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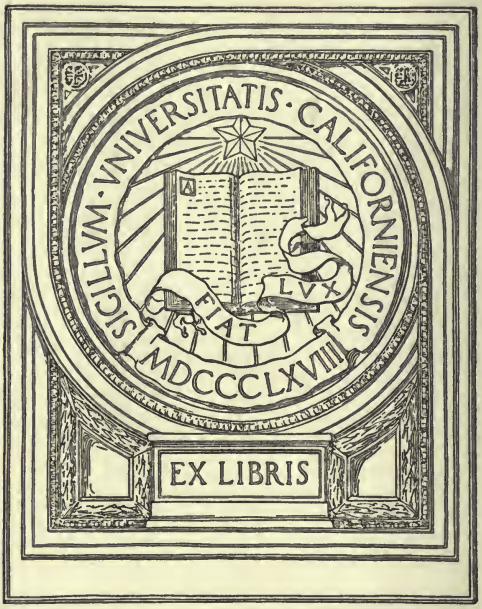


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THE

# WIDOW BARNABY.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
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THE

# WIDOW BARNABY.

BY FRANCES TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF

"THE VICAR OF WREXHILL," "A ROMANCE OF VIENNA," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
*Price Twenty-Four Shillings.*

1839.

# THE WIDOW BARNABY.

## CHAPTER I.

MRS. BARNABY LOSES HER SENSES, AND RECOVERS THEM. — SHE TAKES A DESPERATE RESOLUTION. — MISS MORRISON PROVES HERSELF A FRIEND IN NEED. — AGNES FINDS CONSOLATION IN SORROW.

Mrs. Barnaby's horror on recovering her senses (for she really did fall into a swoon) was in very just proportion to the extent of the outlay her noble vision had cost her. To Miss Morrison, who had listened to all her hopes, she scrupled not to manifest her despair, not, however, entering into the financial part of it, but leaving it to be understood by her sympathizing friend, that her agony proceeded wholly from disappointed love.

"What a Lovelace! .... what a Lothario! .... what a finished deceiver! .... *Kel*



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*oreur!* . . . ." exclaimed the pitying spinster . . . . "And how thankful ought I to be that no man can ever again cause me such terrible emotion . . . . *Nong jammy!*"

"Gracious Heaven! what is to become of me?" cried Mrs. Barnaby, apparently but little consoled by this assurance of her friend's exemption from a similar misfortune; "what ought I to do, Miss Morrison? . . . . If I set off instantly for London, do you think I could reach it before he leaves it for Rome?"

Miss Morrison, having turned to the newspaper, examined its date, and read the fatal paragraph again, replied, "You certainly could, my dear Mrs Barnaby, if this statement be correct; but I would not do it, if I were you, without thinking very seriously about it . . . . It is true I never had a lord for a lover myself, but I believe when they run restive, they are exceedingly difficult to hold; and if you do go after him, and fail at last to touch his cruel heart, you will be only worse off than you are now . . . . *Say clare.*"

"That may be all very true in one sense,

Miss Morrison," replied the unhappy widow; "but there is such a thing as pursuing a man lawfully for breach of promise of marriage, and .... though money is no object to me.... I should glory in getting damages from him, if only to prove to the world that he is a scoundrel!"

"That is quite another thing, indeed," said the confidant, "*toot a fay;* and, if you mean to bring an action against him, I am pretty sure that I could be very useful to you; for my brother is an attorney in London, and is reckoned particularly clever about everything of the kind. But have you any proof, my dear lady? .... that is what my brother will be sure to say to you.... I know you have had lots of letters; and if you have kept them all, it is most likely my brother may find out something like proof.... *Eel ay see abeel!*"

"Proof?.... To be sure I have proof enough, if that's all that's wanted; and I'll go to your brother at once, Miss Morrison, for revenge I'll have.... if nothing else."

"Then of course you'll take all his love

letters with you, Mrs. Barnaby; and I think, if you would let me look over them, I should be able to tell you whether they would answer the purpose or not.—*Jay me coney ung pew.*"

"I should have no objection in the world to your seeing them every one," replied the outraged lady; .... "but I am thinking, Miss Morrison, that I have an immense deal of business to do, and that I shall never get through it without your friendly help .... I am thinking...."

And Mrs. Barnaby was thinking, and very much to the purpose too. She was thinking, that though she had squandered about seventy or eighty pounds in trifling purchases, by far the greater part of the expenses her noble lover had induced her to run into, were still in the shape of debts, the money with which she proposed to discharge them being as yet paying her interest in the funds. Could she contrive to leave the heaviest of these debts unpaid till she knew the result of her intended attack upon Lord Mucklebury's purse, it would be very convenient. Perhaps some vague notion that she, too, might

visit the continent, and thus escape the necessity of paying them at all, might mix itself with her meditations; but at any rate she very speedily decided upon leaving Cheltenham the following day without mentioning her intention to her milliner, mercer, tailor, shoemaker, hosier, perfumer, livery-stable keeper, librarian, or even to her hair-dresser. If she got damages, she should certainly return and pay them all with great *éclat;* if not.... circumstances must decide what it would be most advisable for her to do.

Great as was her esteem and affection for Miss Morrison, she did not think it necessary to trouble her with all these trifling details, but resumed the conversation by saying,—

"Yes, my dear Miss Morrison, I am thinking that the best thing I can do will be to go to London for a day or two, see your brother, put all my documents into his hands, and then return to Cheltenham for the remainder of the season, for I am sure I should be more likely to recover my spirits in your friendly society than anywhere else."

"Indeed I approve your resolution altogether," replied Miss Morrison; "and I will write a line by you to my brother, telling him that whatever he does to assist you, I shall take as a personal favour to myself."

"I cannot thank you enough!" said the widow, pressing her hand .... "We shall be able to get everything ready to-night I hope; and when my coachman comes as usual for orders at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, tell him, my dear friend, to drive you about wherever you like to go.... And you may mention, if you please, that I shall want him to take us a long drive on Saturday to see the Roman Pavement .... I mean to return on Friday night.... for what will be the use, you know, of my staying in town?"

"None in the world .... but I think you had better name Monday for the drive .... for fear you should be too tired on Saturday."

"Well, just as you please about that .... but you had better go and write your letter, and I'll speak to Agnes and my maid about packing."

"Perhaps you will not like to take Miss Willoughby .... I will take the greatest care of her, if you will leave her in my charge."

"How *very* kind! .... But I would rather take her .... I can't do without somebody to lace my stays and fasten my dress, and I want my maid to finish the work she is about. .... She is an exquisite darner, and I have set her to mend the rent that hateful Lord Mucklebury made in my India muslin .... So I don't mean to take her."

* * * * *

Nothing of any kind occurred to interfere with the execution of this hastily, but by no means unskilfully, imagined plan. The ready-money expenditure of Mrs. Barnaby had been so lavish, that she had bought golden opinions from master, mistress, men, and maids throughout the establishment; and when she summoned Mr.——, the landlord, to her presence, and informed him that she was going to London for a couple of days on business, but should not give up her rooms, as she should take neither of her servants with her, he received

the communication with great satisfaction, and promised that no one but her own people should enter her drawing-room till her return.

This preliminary business happily settled, Mrs. Barnaby mounted the stairs to her bedroom, where, as usual, she found Agnes busily occupied in her corner, the hour for an evening engagement made with Lady Stephenson not having yet arrived.

For some reason or other Mrs. Barnaby never enjoyed any flirtation so much in the presence of Agnes as without her; and it was for this reason that at Cheltenham, as well as at Clifton, she had encouraged her making acquaintance for herself; thus her constant intercourse with Lady Elizabeth Norris and Lady Stephenson had never in any degree been impeded by her aunt.

Mrs. Barnaby was aware that Agnes had engaged to pass this evening with them; and when she looked at her tranquil face as she entered the room she felt greatly disposed to plague her by saying that she must stay at home to pack, and could not go .... But a

moment's reflection suggested to her that the less fuss she made about this packing the better, and therefore only told her that she was obliged to set off by seven o'clock the next morning for London, on business that would detain her for a day or two .... that she meant to take her, and leave her maid; and that before she set off upon her gossiping visit, it would be necessary to pack her trunk.

Agnes laid down her book, and looked surprised.

"Don't stare so like a fool, Agnes .... Do what I bid you instantly."

"There will be no occasion for me to pack much, aunt, if we are only to stay a day or two," said Agnes.

"When I tell you to pack your trunk, miss, I mean that your trunk shall be packed, and I won't trouble you to give me any opinion on the subject."

"Am I to put everything into it, aunt?"

"Plague of my life, yes!" replied Mrs. Barnaby, whose vexed spirit seemed to find relief in speaking harshly.

Without further remonstrance Agnes set about obeying her; and the little all that formed her mourning wardrobe was quickly transferred from the two drawers allowed her to the identical trunk which aunt Betsy had provided for her first journey from Silverton to Empton.

"And my books, aunt?".... said Agnes, fixing her eyes on the heated countenance of the widow with some anxiety.

Mrs. Barnaby hesitated, and Agnes saw she did. It was not because the little library of her niece formed the chief happiness of her life that she scrupled at bidding her leave them behind, but because she suspected that they, and their elegant little case, were of some marketable value...."You may take them if you will," she said at length....."I don't care a straw what you take, or what you leave ....only don't plague me.... You must know, I suppose, if you are not quite an idiot, that when people go to London on business, it is possible they may stay longer than they expect."

Agnes asked no more questions, but quietly packed up everything that belonged to her; and when the work, no very long one, was completed, she said,—

"Can I be of any use to you, aunt, before I go out?"

"I should like to know what use you are ever likely to be of to anybody,".... was the reply. "Take yourself off, in God's name!—the sooner the better."

The very simple toilet of Agnes was soon arranged; and having left everything in perfect order for departure, she uttered a civil but unanswered "Good-b'ye, aunt," and went away.

It so chanced that a little volume of poems, lent to her by Lady Stephenson, had been left in the drawing-room, and Agnes, wishing to return it before leaving Cheltenham, entered the room to look for it. As a good many circulating-library volumes were lying about, it was some minutes before she found it; and just as she had succeeded, and was leaving the apartment, Miss Morrison appeared at the door

She had a letter in her hand, and a bustling, busy look and manner, which led Agnes to suppose that she had something of consequence to say to her aunt.

"Shall I run up stairs and desire my aunt to come to you, Miss Morrison?" said she.

"No, thank you, my dear .... you are very kind, but I think I had better go up to her; I only stepped in first to see if she was here .... She is very busy packing, I suppose, and perhaps I can help her."

"Then you know, Miss Morrison, that she is going to London to-morrow?" said Agnes.

"Oh! dear, yes: I believe it was I put it into her head first, .... and this is the letter she is to take to my brother. I am sure I hope she 'll succeed with all my heart; and I should like to hear that Lord Mucklebury had ten thousand pounds to pay her for damages."

"Damages!" repeated Agnes; "what for?"

"What for, my dear child? .... Why, for having used her so abominably ill, to be sure .... there is nobody that saw them together

as I did, but must have supposed he intended to marry her."

"And if he has used her ill, Miss Morrison," said Agnes, looking greatly alarmed, "will it not be exposing herself still more if she goes to law about it? Indeed, Miss Morrison, you should not advise her to do anything so very wrong and disagreeable."

"Don't blame me, my dear, I beg of you ....the idea was quite her own *toot a fay*, I assure you, and all I have done to further it was just writing this letter to my brother for her. He is a very clever lawyer, and I 'm sure she could not do better."

"It would be much better, Miss Morrison, if she did not do anything," said Agnes, while tears started to her eyes at the idea of this fresh exposure.

"I don't think, my dear Miss Agnes, that you can be much of a judge," retorted the adviser. "However. as you do choose to give an opinion upon the subject, and seem to be so very much afraid that she should expose herself, I must just tell you that you owe it

to me if she does not go galloping after Lord Mucklebury all the way to Rome. . . . She had the greatest possible inclination to do so, I assure you. . . . However, I think that I have put it out of her head by talking to her of damages. . . . . But you are going down stairs, and I am going up. . . . so, good-b'ye. . . . Don't frighten yourself more than is needful; it is as likely as not that you will never be called into court . . . . *O revor!*"

Agnes, sick at heart, and trembling for the future, repaired to the house of Lady Elizabeth. Lady Stephenson was at the piano-forte, and the old lady reading near a window; but as soon as her young guest was announced, she closed her volume, and said, "You are late, little girl . . . . we have been expecting you this hour, and this is the last evening we shall have quietly to ourselves; for Colonel Hubert writes us word that he is coming to-morrow, and he is a much more stay-at-home person than Sir Edward."

Colonel Hubert coming to Cheltenham the very day she was to leave it! . . . . These were

not tidings to cheer her spirits, already agitated and depressed, and when she attempted to speak, she burst into tears. Lady Stephenson was at her side in a moment. "Agnes!" .... she said, "what ails you?.... You are as white as a ghost..... Had you heard any agitating news before you came here?"

Struck by the accent with which this was spoken, and perceiving in a moment that Lady Stephenson thought the mention of Colonel Hubert's arrival had caused her emotion, she hastened to reply, and did so perhaps with more frankness than she might have shewn had she not been particularly anxious to prove that there were other and very sufficient reasons for her discomposure.

"News most painful and most sad to me, Lady Stephenson," she said.... "I believe you have heard my aunt Barnaby's foolish flirtation with Lord Mucklebury spoken of.... Lady Elizabeth was laughing about it the other day."

"And who was not, my dear?.... The saucy Viscount has made her, they say, the

subject of a ballad.... But is it for this you weep?.... Or is it because he is gone away, and that there 's an end of it?"

"Alas! Lady Elizabeth, there is not an end of it, and it is for that I weep.... though indeed I ought to beg your pardon for bringing such useless sorrow here;.... but I find that my aunt fancies she has a claim upon him — a legal claim, and that she is going to London to morrow to bring an action against him."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the old lady, looking at poor Agnes with very genuine compassion.... "God knows you may well weep, my poor child.... I shall begin to think I gave but sorry advice, Agnes, when I told you to stay with her. It may, after all, be better to run some risk in leaving her, than brave certain disgrace and ridicule by remaining to reside in her family."

"Is she going to take you to town with her, Agnes?" inquired Lady Stephenson with a look of deep concern.

"Yes, Lady Stephenson, I am to go with her."

There was a very painful silence of a minute or two. Both the admiring friends of Agnes would have done much to save her from being a sharer in such an enterprize ; but to interfere with the indisputable authority of such a woman as Mrs. Barnaby in her arrangements concerning a niece, who had no dependence but on her, was out of the question, and the conviction that it was so kept them silent.

" How did you hear this strange story, my dear ?" said Lady Elizabeth. . . . " Did your aunt explain to you her ridiculous purpose herself?"

" No, Lady Elizabeth . . . . she only bade me prepare my trunk for going to London with her. . . . It was Miss Morrison, whom I met by chance as I came out, who told me the object of the journey ; . . . . and dreadful as this going to law would be, it is not the worst thing I fear."

" What worse can there be, Agnes ?" said Lady Stephenson.

" I am almost ashamed to tell you of such fears, . . . . but when I uttered something like a reproach to Miss Morrison for having advised this journey, and writing a letter about it to

her brother, who is a lawyer in London, she told me that I ought to be grateful to her for preventing my aunt's following Lord Mucklebury all the way to Rome, for that such was her first intention . . . . and" . . . . continued Agnes, bursting anew into tears, "I greatly, greatly suspect that she has not given up this intention yet."

The two ladies exchanged glances of pity and dismay, and Lady Elizabeth, making her a sign to come close to her, took her kindly by the hand, saying, in accents much more gentle than she usually bestowed on any one, "My poor, dear girl, what makes you think this? Tell me, Agnes, tell me all they have said to you."

Agnes knelt down on the old lady's footstool, and gently kissing the venerable hand which held hers, said, "It is very, *very* kind of you to let me tell you all, . . . . and your judgment will be more to be trusted than mine as to what it may mean; but my reason for thinking that my aunt is going to do more than she confesses to Miss Morrison is, that

she has publicly declared her intended absence will be only for two days; and yet, though she told me this too, she ordered me to pack up everything, I had, .... even the little collection of books I told you of, Lady Stephenson, .... and, moreover, instead of letting her maid put up her things, I left her doing it herself, and saw her before I came away putting a vast variety of her most valuable things in a great travelling trunk that she could never think of taking, if it were really her intention to stay in London only two days, and then return to Cheltenham."

"Very suspicious .... very much so indeed," said the old lady; "and all I can say to you in reply, my poor child, is this. *You must not go abroad with her!* I am not rich enough to charge myself with providing for you, nor must your friend Emily here frighten her new husband by talking of taking possession of you, Agnes, .... but .... you must not go abroad with that woman. Governess you must be, I suppose, if things go on in this way; and instead of opposing it, I will try if I cannot

find a situation in which you may at least be safer than with this aunt Barnaby. Whatever happens, you must let us hear from you; and remember, the moment you discover that she really proposes to take you abroad, you are to put yourself into a Cheltenham coach, and come directly to me."

What words were these for Agnes to listen to!.... Colonel Hubert was to take up his residence in that house on the morrow; and she was now told in a voice of positive command, that if what she fully expected would happen, did happen, she was at once to seek a shelter there! She dared not trust her voice to say, "I thank you," but she ventured to raise her eyes to the hard-featured but benignant countenance that bent over her, and the kiss she received on her forehead proved that though her silence might not be fully understood, her gratitude was not doubted.

The evening was not, like many others recently passed there, so happy, that Mrs. Barnaby's footman often came to escort her home before she thought the time for parting could

be half arrived. They had no music, no scraps of poetry in Italian or in English, as touch-stones of taste and instruction, with which Lady Stephenson loved to test the powers of her young favourite; but the conversation rested almost wholly upon the gloomy and uncertain future. At length the moment came in which she was to bid these valued friends adieu; they embraced and blessed her with tenderness, nay, even with tears; but little did they guess the tumult that swelled the breast of Agnes. It was Hubert's sister to whom she clung .... it was Hubert's aunt — almost his mother — who hung over her, looking as if she were her mother too! .... and on the morrow he would be with them, and he would hear her named; for notwithstanding their unmeasured superiority to her in all ways, they could not forget her so soon, .... he would hear of her sorrows, of the dangers that surrounded her; and he would hear too, perhaps, of the shelter offered her in the very house he dwelt in.

All these thoughts were busy in her head as she uttered the last farewell, and turned

again in passing through the door to look once more on those who would so soon be looked at by him.

There was certainly a strange pleasure mixed with all this sadness, for though she wept through half the night, she would not have exchanged the consciousness of having been brought nearer to him, even by the act of having mingled tears in parting with his nearest relations, for all the enjoyment that a tranquil spirit and a calm night's rest could offer in exchange for it.

## CHAPTER II.

MRS. BARNABY EFFECTS HER RETREAT FROM CHELTENHAM.—SHE CARRIES WITH HER A LETTER.—ITS EFFECT.—AN AMIABLE ATTORNEY.—SPECIMENS OF A NOBLE STYLE OF LETTER-WRITING.—CONSOLATION.

Though the baggage of Mrs. Barnaby was strangely disproportionate to the period she had named for her absence, it seemed not to excite suspicion, which might, perhaps, be owing to the well known splendour of her elaborate toilet, which she not unfrequently changed four times in a day, requiring—as all who thought on the subject must be aware—an extent of travelling equipment much exceeding the portion assigned to ordinary ladies.

So she passed forth unchallenged, and unchallenged saw her treasures deposited on roof and in rumble-tumble till all were stowed

away; and then, having affectionately squeezed the hand of Miss Morrison, who accompanied her to the stage, she climbed into it, followed by the pale and melancholy Agnes.

Our widow was now beginning to be an experienced traveller, and her first care on reaching London was to secure rooms in a private lodging-house. Notwithstanding the noble visions with which she had recreated her fancy during the last month, she now with great good sense sent them all to the moon, knowing she could easily call them back again if all went well with her; but determined that they should in no way interfere with her enjoyment of the more substantial goods that were still within her reach; so, she commissioned the maid of the house to procure her three dozen of oysters and a pot of porter, with which, while Agnes wept herself to sleep, she repaid herself for her day's fatigue, and wisely laid in a stock of strength for the morrow.

Her first object, of course, was to hold communication with the brother of her friend, "Magnus Morrison, Esq. attorney-at-law,

Red Lion Square." Such was the address the letter entrusted to her bore; and at breakfast the following morning she sat gazing at it for some minutes before she could decide whether it would be better to convey it herself, or prepare the lawyer to receive her by letting it precede her for a few hours. She finally decided to send it before her;—the wisdom of which determination will be evident upon the perusal of the letter, such an introduction being well calculated to ensure all the zealous attention she desired.

Miss Morrison's letter ran thus:—

"My dear Brother,

"I never fail, as you well know, to catch all the fish for your net that comes in my way.... *crowyee sellaw too jure*.... and I now send you a client whom I have little doubt you will find answer in every way. She is a most charming woman, and my most particular friend....I don't know a more charming person anywhere, not even in my dear Paris,.... so rich, so free in all her expenses, so remarkably obliging, and so very

handsome for all those who admire tall, large beauties. But you are too good a lawyer to listen to all this when business is in hand, and so I must come *o fay*. And now, Magnus, be sure to attend to every word. Mrs. Barnaby —this charming friend of mine—has for the last month been receiving the most marked and the most tender attentions from Lord Mucklebury. He is a viscount, my dear Magnus, and—observe—as rich as a Jew. This nobleman has given her, poor dear lady! every reason in the world to believe that his dearest wish, hope, and intention was to marry her; and she, good, tender-hearted creature! perfectly adored him, devoting every hour of the day to the finding out where he was to be seen, and the going there to see him. She had no secrets whatever from me the whole time, and I knew everything that was going on from the first moment he ever kissed her hand to the most tender interviews that ever passed between them. And how do you think it has all ended?.... Oh! Magnus, it is impossible to deny that the male sex—lords and all—are

most dreadfully deceitful and false-hearted. All this devoted love, going on, as I tell you, for a whole month, has just ended in nothing. My lord set off in his travelling carriage, with four horses and an out-rider, as we subsequently ascertained, without even taking any leave of the lady at all, or explaining himself the least bit either one way or the other. You may easily guess her feelings.... Her first idea, poor thing, was to follow him to the world's end—for there is no doubt in the world that her attachment was of the most sincere kind; but luckily she confided this romantic thought to me, and it struck me directly, Magnus, that the best thing in the world for her to do would be to put the whole affair into your hands. She has got quantities of his letters .... they are very little letters, to be sure, folded up sometimes not much bigger than a shilling; but still letters are letters, you know; and I can't but think that, with your cleverness, something might be made of an action for damages. Of course, it is natural to suppose that I am a little partial to this sort of measure, because I can't well have for-

gotten yet that the best part of my snug little fortune came to me in the same way, thanks to the good management of our dear good father, Magnus.... The dear lady listened to reason in a minute, and consented to put herself in your hands, for which reason she is going to set off for London to-morrow morning. She will bring all Lord Mucklebury's letters with her, and it will be for you to judge what use can be made of them;—only it is but right to mention, that there is no doubt in the world but that Mrs. Barnaby is quite rich enough to pay handsomely, whether she gains the cause or loses it.

"I am, my dear Magnus,

"Your affectionate sister,

"SARAH MORRISON."

Mrs. Barnaby enclosed this letter in an envelope, in which she wrote,—

"MRS. BARNABY presents her compliments to Mr. Magnus Morrison, and will be happy to see him on the business to which the enclosed letter refers at any hour he will name."

"No. 5, Half-moon Street, Piccadilly."

Having consigned her packet to the post, the widow declared to her anxious companion that she did not mean to waste her time as long as she remained in London; but should walk to every part of the town, and should expect her to do the same.

"Will there not be danger of losing ourselves, aunt?" said Agnes. "London, you know, is so much bigger than any place you ever saw."

"And what 's the good of that piece of wisdom, Miss Solomon? Perhaps you don't know that I have a tongue in my head, and that the Londoners speak English? .... Come, and put on your bonnet, if you please, and I 'll promise not to leave you in any of the gutters, but bring you safe home again to *No.* 5, *Half-moon Street*, *Piccadilly*. There, you see, I shall know what place to ask for. Won't that do for you?"

Agnes felt that all remonstrance would be in vain, and submitted; though the idea of being dragged through the streets of London by her aunt Barnaby, dressed in the identical green

satin gown and pink feathers which had first attracted Lord Mucklebury's attention, was by no means an agreeable prospect.

The expedition, however, fatiguing and disagreeable as it proved, was achieved without any very disastrous results. Mrs. Barnaby, indeed, was twice very nearly knocked down by a cab, while staring too eagerly about her when crossing the streets; and friendly as was the old black crape veil of poor Agnes, it could not wholly save her from some tolerably obvious efforts to find out whether the face it sheltered was worthy the graceful symmetry of the person who wore it; .... but they nevertheless reached their Half-moon Street without any positive injury to life or limb.

At eight o'clock in the evening, while Mrs. Barnaby and her weary companion were taking tea, the drawing-room door opened, and Mr. Magnus Morrison was announced, and most cordially welcomed by the widow, who not only saw in him the lawyer from whom she hoped to learn how to replenish her waning finances, but also the brother of her dear

Miss Morrison, and the only acquaintance she could hope at this trying moment to find or make in London.

But now, as heretofore, the presence of Agnes was inconvenient, which she took care to signify by saying to the lawyer, "I am greatly indebted to you, Mr. Morrison, for your early attention to my note; and I shall be very glad to talk with you on the business that brings me to London.... but not quite yet.... we really must be quite by ourselves, for it will be necessary that I should have your whole attention. Will you, in the mean time, permit me to offer you tea?"

Before Mr. Morrison could reply Agnes was on her feet, and asking her aunt in a whisper if she would give her leave to go to bed. "Yes, if you like it, my darling!".... replied Mrs. Barnaby, whose tenderness for her niece was always awakened by the presence of strangers. "I am sure you look tired to death.... But bring down first, my dear, my writing-desk; and remember, my love, to take care that I have warm water when I come up;.... and

don't forget, Agnes, to put my bonnet and shawl, and all that, nicely away.... and see that I have paper for curling my hair ready on the dressing-table; .... and don't go to bed till you have put out my lilac silk for to-morrow; and just put a stitch in the blonde of my bonnet-cap, for I pulled it almost off."

All this was said by the widow in a coaxing sort of half whisper, with an arm round her victim's waist, and a smile of the most fascinating kindness on her own lips.

The desk was brought, and the consulting parties left alone; while Agnes, as she performed the different tasks imposed on her, and which her great fatigue rendered heavy, could not for an instant banish from her mind the question that had incessantly haunted her from the hour she left the drawing-room of Lady Elizabeth .... "Will she go abroad? .... Shall I be obliged to return to Cheltenham without her? .... Shall I be obliged to go to the house where he is living?"

* * * * *

Mr. Magnus Morrison was by no means an

ill-looking man, and though a bachelor of thirty-five, had as little of quizzical peculiarity about him as a careful attorney of that age, unpolished by a wife, can be expected to have. Mrs. Barnaby, though a little his senior, was still, as we know, a lady *à prétention*, and never permitted any gentleman to approach her without making an experiment upon him with her fine eyes. Their success in the present instance was neither so violent as in the case of Major Allen, nor so instantaneous as in that of the false-hearted peer; nevertheless enough was achieved to throw an agreeable sort of extraneous interest into the business before them, and the widow disdained not as it proceeded to decorate her narrative and herself with such graces as none but a Mrs. Barnaby can display.

Having given her own version, and with such flourishes as her nature loved, of Lord Mucklebury's violent passion for her, she asked her attentive and somewhat captivated auditor what species of testimony was required to prove a promise of marriage in such a manner as to

secure large damages, "for without being quite certain of obtaining such, you must be aware, my dear sir, that a woman of my station, connexions, and fortune, could not think of appearing in court."

"Assuredly not," replied Mr. Magnus Morrison fervently. "Such a measure is never to be resorted to unless the evidence is of a nature that no cross-examination can set aside. My sister tells me, madam, that you have letters...."

"Yes, Mr. Morrison, I have many.... though I am sorry to say that many more have been destroyed. (This was a figure of poetry, and of a kind that the widow often adopted to give strength to the narrative portion of her conversation.)

"That is greatly to be regretted, Mrs. Barnaby.... though we must hope that among those which remain sufficient proof of this very atrocious case will be found to answer the purposes of justice. Was there any principle of selection in the manner in which some were preserved and others destroyed?"

"I can hardly say," replied the lady, "that it was done on any principle, unless the feeling can be so called which leads a woman of delicacy to blush and shrink from preserving the effusions of a passion so vehement as that expressed in some of the letters of Lord Mucklebury."

"They were, then, the most ardent declarations of his attachment that you destroyed, Mrs. Barnaby?"

"Most certainly," said the widow, throwing her eyes upon the carpet.

"It is unfortunate, very unfortunate," observed the lawyer, "though it shews a delicacy of mind that it is impossible not to admire. Will you give me leave, madam, to peruse such of the letters as you have preserved?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Mrs. Barnaby, unlocking her writing-desk, "and though I know not how to regret the existence of such feelings, Mr. Morrison, I will not deny that, for the sake of honour and justice, I am sorry now that what I have to shew you is so much the least explicit part of the correspondence."

She then drew forth the packet which contained (be it spoken in confidence) every syllable ever addressed to her by the laughter-loving Viscount; and greatly as Mr. Magnus Morrison began to feel interested in the case, and much as he would have liked to bring so charming a client into court, he very soon perceived that there was nothing in these highly-scented, but diminutive *feuilles volantes*, at all likely to produce any effect on a jury approaching to that elicited by the evidence of the learned and celebrated Sergeant Buzfuz on an occasion somewhat similar. He continued to read them all, however, and they were numerous, with the most earnest attention and unwearied industry, permitting little or no emotion of any kind to appear on his countenance as he proceeded, and determined to utter no word approaching to an opinion till he had carefully perused them all. Important as Mrs. Barnaby flattered herself these little letters might eventually prove, and interesting as her lawyer found every word of them, the whole collection might perhaps be considered as somewhat weari-

some, full of repetition, and even trifling, by the general reader, for which reason a few only shall be selected as specimens, taken at hazard, and without any attention either to their dates or the particular events which led to them.

No. 1.

"PRIMA DONNA DEL MUNDO! *

"Walk you to-day?....At three be it ....at which hour my station will be the library.

"M."

No. 2.

"BELLISSIMA!

"Should I appear to-day (you may guess where) with a friend on my arm, let it not change the sweet demeanour of my charming widow. He is an excellent fellow, but one whom I always treat as if he were not in existence;—for in truth, being almost as dread-

* Lord Mucklebury had been assured, on the authority of Mrs. Barnaby herself, that her favourite language was the Italian.

fully in love as myself, he neither sees nor hears.

"M."

No. 3.

"BELLA DONNA!

"It is three days since I have received a line from the fairest lady in Cheltenham! Write me a whole page, I beseech you, .... and let it be such a one as shall console me under the necessity of dining and passing the whole evening with half a dozen he-fellows, when the champagne will but ill atone for the sparkling eyes whose light I shall lose by being among them. But if I have one of your exquisite billets in my waistcoat-pocket, I shall bear the loss better.

"M."

No. 4.

"VEDOVA MARAVIGLIOSA!

"Should I find the Barnaby disengaged in her saloon, were my audacious feet to bear me across its threshold this evening?

"M."

Such, and such like, were the manuscripts submitted by Mrs. Barnaby to the inspection of her lawyer. When he had carefully and deliberately gone through the whole collection, he tied them all up again with a bit of rose-coloured ribbon, as he had found them, and pushing them back to her across the table, said with something like a sigh,—

"It is greatly to be lamented, madam, that some of these little notes had not been consigned to the flames instead of the letters you have described to me, .... for my judgment decidedly is, that although every one of these documents tends to prove the admiration of their author for the lady to whom they are addressed, there is not one of them which can be said to contain a positive promise of marriage, or even, I fear, any implied intention of making a proposal.... so that I am afraid we should not get a verdict against my Lord Mucklebury on the strength of any evidence contained therein; nevertheless, if you have witnesses to prove that such proposal and such promise have been actually made to you by his lordship, I

think these letters might help us to make out a very pretty case, and one which, if it did not eventually bring you a large sum of money, would at least be exceedingly vexatious to his lordship—a circumstance which might in some degree tend to soothe the naturally outraged feelings of so charming a lady, so villanously treated."

Mr. Morrison said this with his eyes fixed steadily on the widow's face, intending to ascertain what chance there might be of her wishing to spend a few hundred pounds for the pleasure of plaguing her perfidious deluder; but he could make out nothing from this scrutiny. Neverthless, the mind of Mrs. Barnaby was busily at work; so many schemes, however, were battling together in her brain, that the not being able to discover which preponderated, shewed no want of skill in the lawyer.

First, she had a very strong inclination for a personal interview with Lord Mucklebury, in order to see how a little passionate grief might affect him. Secondly, she greatly desired to profit by the present occasion for seeing some of those

London sights which country ladies and gentlemen so love to talk about. Thirdly, she very ardently wished to avoid the necessity of paying the debts which his lordship's base delusions had induced her to contract at Cheltenham. Fourthly, and lastly, the project of a journey to Rome was beginning to take a very decided shape in her fancy; but amidst all this there remained not the smallest wish or intention of trying to revenge her wrongs by the assistance of the law.... She was beginning to be too well aware of the melting nature of money in the funds, to wish that the villanous Viscount should lead her to expend another shilling upon him.

After the silence of a few minutes, Mrs. Barnaby raised her eyes from the ground, and fixing them with a soft, gentle, resigned smile upon Mr. Morrison, said,—

"I thank you gratefully, Mr. Morrison, for your frank opinion, given too in so gentlemanlike a manner as to make me feel that I am indeed rather in the hands of a friend than a lawyer; .... and in return I will use the same

frankness with you. I have loved Lord Mucklebury most sincerely! .... loved him with all the pure disinterested ardour of my character; but the same warm heart, Mr. Morrison, which thus surrenders itself without suspicion or restraint, is precisely of the nature most prompt to reject and forget a being proved to be unworthy of it.... Therefore I may now truly say, that this poor bosom (pressing her two hands upon it) suffers more from the void within it, than from tender regret; and I am greatly inclined, since I cannot benefit by your able services as a lawyer, to urge my friendship with your dear sister as a claim upon your kindness as a gentleman. Will you assist to cure the painful void I speak of by giving me your help in my endeavours to see all that is best worth looking at in London? .... I am sure it would do me good; not to mention that it might give pleasure to the dear child whom you saw with me when you entered. She is quite my idol, and I should delight in procuring her an amusement which I know she would so particularly enjoy."

Mr. Morrison, who was a shrewd, quick-sighted man, thought there was considerable food for speculation in this speech, and, had leisure served him, he might have reasoned upon it in a spirit not much unlike that of Benedict.... "Will you assist to cure the painful void?.... which is as much as to say ...." and so on.... He waited not, however, to give this all the attention it merited, but remembering clearly his sister's statement respecting the widow's fortune, replied with most obliging readiness,—

"There is nothing, my dear madam, that I would not joyfully do to prove my wish of serving a lady so highly esteemed by my sister; and one also, permit me to add, so deserving the admiration of all the world," replied the gallant attorney.

"Well, then, my dear sir," rejoined the widow, in accents of renewed cheerfulness, "I throw myself entirely upon you, and shall be quite ready to begin to-morrow to go here, there, and everywhere, exactly as you command."

A scheme for St. Paul's and the Tower in the morning, and one of the theatres at night, was then sketched out; and the gentleman departed, by no means certain that this adventure might not terminate by being one of the most important of his life.

## CHAPTER III.

A BOLD MEASURE.—A TOUR DE FORCE ON THE PART OF MRS. BARNABY, AND OF SAVOIR FAIRE ON THAT OF LORD MUCKLEBURY. — SIGHT-SEEING.— THE WIDOW RESOLVES UPON ANOTHER JOURNEY.

Mr. Morrison, who really had a little business, though not very much, had named two o'clock as the earliest hour at which he should be able to come to Half-moon Street for the purpose of escorting the ladies in a hackney-coach to the city; and it was during the hours that intervened between her breakfast and this time, that the active-minded Mrs. Barnaby determined upon making a private visit to Mivart's Hotel, in the hope of seeing Lord Mucklebury.

She had quite made up her mind to the worst, as may be seen from the projects already maturing themselves in her brain, as the consequence; nevertheless she thought it was just

possible that his lordship might be unable to resist the expression of sorrow in eyes he had so vehemently admired; and, at any rate, there was something so .... so touching in the idea of this final interview, that she could not refuse herself the satisfaction of making the experiment.

Telling Agnes that she had a little shopping to do before their sight-seeing began, and that she would not take her, for fear she should be as stupidly fatigued as on the night before, she mounted to her bed-room, adorned herself in the most becoming costume she could devise, and with somewhat less rouge than usual, that the traitor might see how sorrow worked, set forth on her expedition.

Having reached Piccadilly, she called a coach, and in a few minutes was safely deposited before Mivart's door.

"Is Lord Mucklebury here?".... she inquired in a voice of authority of the first official she encountered.

"Yes, ma'am," was the answer. "His lordship is at breakfast."

"I must see him, if you please, directly!"

"Is it by appointment, ma'am?" questioned the discreet waiter, looking at her keenly.... "His lordship is just going to set off, and is too busy, I believe, to see anybody."

"He is not too busy to see me—I must see him directly!"

"Is it an appointment?" repeated the man, in an accent not the most respectful.

"Yes, it is,".... replied the unblushing widow.

"Better call his own man, Joe," said another napkined functionary, attracted by the appearance of the lady.

"You had better take this sovereign," said Mrs. Barnaby in a whisper.

Apparently the man thought this advice the best; for taking the coin with such practised dexterity as hardly to make the action perceptible, he gave the lady a look with his knowing eye that said, "Follow me!".... and slid away among passages and stairs till he had marshalled her to the door of Lord Mucklebury's apartments. Being probably somewhat doubtful whether the office he had performed

would be as gratefully requited by the gentleman as by the lady, he waited not to open the door, but saying, "There 's his room," disappeared, leaving Mrs. Barnaby to announce her ill-used self.

She was a little frightened, but still resolute; and, after pausing for one moment to recover breath, threw open the door and entered.

The waiter's account was strictly true, for his lordship was at breakfast, and his lordship was packing. *En robe de chambre*, with a cup of coffee in one hand, and a bunch of keys in the other, he was standing beside his valet, who knelt before a carriage-seat he was endeavouring to close. Lord Mucklebury was facing the door, and raised his eyes as it opened. The sight that greeted them was assuredly unexpected, but the nerve with which he bore it did honour to his practised philosophy.

"Mrs. Barnaby!" he exclaimed, with a smile, in which his valet seemed to take a share, for the fellow turned his head away to conceal its effect upon him.... "Mrs. Barnaby!.... How

very kind this is.... But I grieve such obliging benevolence should be shewn at a moment when I have so little leisure to express my gratitude.... My dear lady, I am this instant starting for the continent."

"I know it, sir.... I know it but too well!" replied the widow, considerably embarrassed by his easy tone.... "Permit me, however, to speak to you for one moment before you set out."

"Assuredly!.... Place yourself on this sofa, Mrs. Barnaby.... How deeply I regret that moments so delightful.... Confound you, Rawlins, you 'll break those hinges to pieces if you force them so.... My dear lady!.... I am shocked to death;.... but, upon my soul, I have not a moment to spare!"

"I wish to speak to you, my lord, without the presence of your servant."

"My dearest Mrs. Barnaby, you need not mind Rawlins any more than the coffee-pot!.... You have no idea what a capital fellow he is!.... true as steel.... silent as the grave....

That 's it, Rawlins! .... I 'll set my foot upon it while you turn the key .... here! it is this crooked one."

"Lord Mucklebury! .... you must be aware," .... began the widow.

"Aware! .... Good Heaven, yes! .... To be sure, I am! But what can I do, my dearest Mrs. Barnaby? .... I must catch the packet, you see.... How is dear, good Miss Morrison? .... Now for the dressing-case, Rawlins! .... don't forget the soap—I 've done with it! .... For goodness' sake, don't tell my excellent friend, Miss Morrison, how very untidy you have found everything about me..... She is so very neat, you know! .... I 'm sure she 'd .... Mind the stoppers, Rawlins — put a bit of cotton upon each of them!"

"Is it thus, Lord Mucklebury, that you receive one who ...."

"I know what you would say, my charming friend!" interrupted his lordship, handing her a plate of buttered toast, .... "that I am the greatest bear in existence! .... No! you will not eat with me? .... But you must excuse

me, dear friend, for I have a long drive before me." And, so saying, Lord Mucklebury seated himself at the table, replenished his coffee-cup, broke the shell of an egg, and seriously set about eating an excellent breakfast.

The widow was at a loss what to do or say next. Had he been rude or angry, or even silent and sullen, or in any other mood in the world but one of such very easy good humour, she could have managed better. But a painful sort of conviction began to creep over her that Lord Mucklebury's present conduct, as well as all that had passed before, was merely the result of high-breeding and fashionable manners, and that lords and ladies always did so to one another. If this were so, rather than betray such rustic ignorance as to appear surprised at it, she would have consented to live without a lover for weeks and weeks to come; .... and the terrible idea followed, that by having ignorantly hoped for too much she might have lost a most delightful opportunity of forming an intimate friendship with a peer of the realm, that might have been credit-

able and useful to her, either abroad or at home.

Fortunately Lord Mucklebury was really hungry, and he ate so heartily for a minute or two, that the puzzled lady had time to settle her purpose, and take the new tone that her ambition suggested to her, which she did with a readiness that his lordship really admired.

"Well!.... I see how it is, my lord," said she; "I come here to ask you to do a commission for me at Rome, where the papers told me you were going; but you are too busy and too hungry to spare a moment to an old acquaintance."

"No! upon my soul!".... said Lord Mucklebury, throwing some of his former homage into his eyes as he bowed to her. "There is no commission in the world you could give me, from New York to Jerusalem, that I would not execute with the fidelity of a western or an eastern slave. What are your commands, bewitching Mrs. Barnaby?"

"Merely, my lord, that you would buy a set of shells for me—as nearly like Lady Ste-

phenson's as possible ; and I dare say," she added, very cleverly drawing out her purse, to avoid any misconception respecting the object, —"I dare say your lordship, who has travelled so much, may be able to tell me pretty nearly what the price will be.... About ten pounds, I think."

And ten golden sovereigns were immediately thrown from the purse upon the table.

Lord Mucklebury, perfectly delighted by this brilliant proof of the versatility of her powers, gaily took her purse from her hand, and replacing the money in it, said —

"It is not so that I execute the commissions of my fair friends, Mrs. Barnaby.... I will note your orders in my pocket-book, thus .... 'A set of the handsomest shells in Rome for the charming Mrs. Barnaby. See!.... I can hardly overlook it ; and when I have the pleasure of presenting them, we will settle about the price."

He replaced her purse in her hand, which he kissed with his best air of Cheltenham gallantry ; upon which she wisely rose, and

saying, with every appearance of being perfectly satisfied with her reception, "Adieu, my lord! forgive my intrusion, and let me hope to have the pleasure of seeing you when you return," she took her departure, perfectly convinced that her new-born conjecture was right, and that lords had privileges not accorded to other men.

This persuasion, however, as well as the interview which gave rise to it, she determined to keep to her own breast; not sorry, perhaps, that some of her friends might go to their graves with the persuasion that, though deserted by him, she once had a nobleman for her lover, and vastly well satisfied with herself for having found out her plebeian blunder in time to prevent the loss of so very valuable a friend as she still thought Lord Mucklebury might be.

She returned in good time to rest and refresh herself with a draught of her favourite beverage (porter) before Mr. Morrison arrived.

If she had thought this gentleman worthy of some little *agaceries* before her definitive interview with her noble friend, she certainly

did not think him less so afterwards, and the morning and the evening passed away with great appearance of enjoyment to both the gentleman and lady. Mrs. Barnaby began to think, as upon former occasions of the same kind, that it would be vastly more agreeable if Agnes were not of the party.

The same idea had occurred to the suffering girl herself more than once in the course of the day. Whether her own wish was father to the thought, or that her aunt had purposely permitted her feelings to be seen, it matters not to inquire ; but when, on the following morning, Agnes complained of head-ache, and expressed a timid wish to be left at home, Mrs. Barnaby, without hesitation, replied,—

" I think you are right, Agnes.... You have no strength for that sort of thing....so it is very lucky you brought your books, and you may unpack them, if you will, and set to work.

This release was hailed with thankfulness.... Lady Stephenson and Miss Peters were both written to during the leisure it afforded, and though she could give no very satisfactory

intelligence to either, there was a pleasure in writing to them that no other occupation could give her.

After this time several days elapsed, during which Mrs. Barnaby was scarcely at home at all, except for the purpose of eating her dinner, which meal Mr. Morrison regularly partook with them.

More than a week passed in this manner; Mrs. Barnaby becoming every day more convinced that, although every sensible woman ought to marry a lord, if she can get one, yet, nevertheless, that an active, intelligent, obliging friend, full of admiration, and obedient to command, was an excellent substitute for everything else during an interregnum between the more violent attachments by which the career of all distinguished women must necessarily be marked. And Mr. Morrison, as he on his side remarked how freely the lady hired her flies and her hackney chariots,—how little she thought of the price of tickets for plays, operas, and that realization of all her dreams of elegant festivity, Vauxhall,—how liberally wine and even brandy

flowed at the savoury little dinners in her drawing-room,—as he remarked on all this, he could not but reason with himself on the greatly superior felicity of being the husband of such a lady, and living without any trouble at all upon her fortune, to the remaining a bachelor in Red Lion Square, under the necessity of working whenever work could be had in order to pay his rent, settle his tailor's bill, and find wherewithal to furnish commons for himself and his one domestic.

It is certain, however, that up to this time no serious idea of marrying Mr. Magnus Morrison had entered the widow's head; on the contrary, she was fully determined that, as soon as she had seen London "well," she would see Paris too, and was not without a vague notion that there might be something very elegant and desirable in becoming the wife of a French grandee. But these ruminations interfered not at all with the amiable amenity of her demeanour to her assiduous attendant. . . . Agnes was as little in their way as it was possible she could be . . . . the weather was remarkably fine

. . . . and, on the whole, it may be doubted if any lady of thirty-seven ever made her first debut in the metropolis of the united kingdoms with more perfect satisfaction to herself.

Mrs. Barnaby reached London on a Thursday evening; the first Sunday shewed her the Foundling, all the little children, and a popular preacher, which together constituted one of Mr. Morrison's favourite lions. The Sunday following, being the last, according to her own secret determination, that she would pass in England, she was left during the early part of the day to her own devices, Mr. Morrison having a deed to draw, which could no longer be safely postponed; and she therefore obligingly asked Agnes if she should not like to go to church with her. Agnes willingly assented, and they went to the morning service at St. James's. In returning thence our gaily-dressed widow, full of animation, and the hope of finding Mr. Morrison ready to take luncheon with her previous to their projected walk in Kensington Gardens, remarked, as she gracefully paced along the crowded pavement, that one indi-

vidual among the many who eyed her appeared to follow her movements with particular attention. Mrs. Barnaby was never stared at without feeling delighted by the compliment she thought it implied, and simpered and frolicked with her parasol in her best manner, till at length, having no one else to whom she could point out the flattering circumstance, she said to Agnes, as they turned down Half-moon Street .... into which the admiring individual turned too ... "Do look at that man, Agnes.... He has never ceased to follow and stare at me since we left the church.... There, now, he is going to pass us again.... Is he not an impudent fellow?"

"Perhaps he knows you, aunt," said Agnes, raising her eyes as the man passed them.... "I think I have seen him at Cheltenham."

This suggestion heightened Mrs. Barnaby's colour so considerably that it was perceptible through all her rouge.

"You have seen him at Cheltenham?.... Where, pray?"

"I do not well remember; in a shop, I think."

Mrs. Barnaby asked no more questions, but knocked rather hastily at the door of her lodgings; but though the person had crossed the street, and in doing so passed close to her, he made no attempt to speak to her, but passed on his way, not, however, before he had so refreshed her memory respecting her Cheltenham debts as to make her suddenly decide upon leaving London on the morrow.

She found Mr. Magnus Morrison waiting for her, as well-looking and as devoted as ever; so she did all but quite forget her recent alarm, its only effect being, when Agnes, as usual, declined her invitation to go out with them, to say in a whisper to her in the window recess farthest removed from her waiting gentleman, "I think I shall leave London to-morrow night, so you may employ yourself in getting everything ready for packing, Agnes. . . ." She then turned gaily to her escort, and they set off together.

During the whole of this tedious week Agnes had used every means within her very limited power to ascertain what her aunt's plans were

for the future; and this not only to satisfy her own natural curiosity on the subject, but also that she might have sufficient information to justify her writing another letter to Lady Stephenson. But all her inquiries had been so vaguely answered, that she was quite as ignorant of what her next movement might be as when she arrived, and was living in a very torturing sort of suspense, between hope that fate by some means or other would oblige her to return to Cheltenham, and fear lest the mystery that veiled the future might only be elucidated when too late for her to obey the command which, *in case of the worst*, was to send her there.

So weary was she both of her present position and of the doubt which concealed the termination of it, that she joyfully set herself to obey the parting injunction of her aunt; and having rapidly gone through this task, began her second letter to her Cheltenham friends, stating exactly all she knew, and all she did not know, and at length leaving her letter unfinished, that her postscript, as she said, might

contain, according to the imputed custom of all ladies, the essential part of her letter.

The fine bonnets and smart waistcoats of Kensington Gardens, together with a bag-ful of queen-cakes, with which she had provided herself for her own refreshment and that of her companion during a promised hour of repose in one of the alcoves, so pleasantly beguiled the hours, that it was near seven before they returned to dinner; when the widow confessed herself too tired for anything more that day; and at an hour much earlier than usual Mr. Morrison took his departure, well informed, as it seemed, of the lady's intentions for the morrow, for Agnes heard him say,—

"Well, then, Mrs. Barnaby.... one more delightful excursion to-morrow—the Surrey Gardens will delight you!.... and at two o'clock I will be here.... Sorry am I to think for the last time.... at least for the present." A cordial hand-shaking followed, and the door closed ofter him.

"I have done what you bid me, aunt," said Agnes; "all your things are got ready for you

to place them as you like, and one of the boxes half filled, just as you did before.... Shall I write the directions, aunt?"

"We can do that to-morrow.... I am tired to death. Ring the bell.... No — run down yourself, for the girl looks as cross as two sticks .... run down, Agnes, and tell her to get my porter directly; and I think you must bring it to me in bed, for I can't keep my eyes open."

"Will you tell me, aunt, where we are going?" said Agnes timidly, as she took up one of the candles to light her steps down two flights of stairs.

"Don't plague me now, Agnes," was the reply; "I have told you that I am tired to death, and nobody but you would think of teazing one with such a question now. You know well enough, though you have not had the grace to thank me for it, that I never take you anywhere that it is not most delightful to go to.... What other country-girl in the world is there at your age that has had the advantages you have.... Exeter.... Clifton.... Cheltenham.... London; and if you don't provoke me

too much, and make me turn you out of house and home, I 'll take you now.... but it 's no matter where—you 'll know soon enough to be grateful, if there 's such a thing as gratitude in your heart.... But I am a fool to expect it, and see you standing there when I 've begged, as if my life depended upon it, that you would *please* to order me a little beer."

Agnes said no more; but went to bed that night with her fears most reasonably strengthened that she should not learn Mrs. Barnaby's destination till it was too late to avoid sharing it, let it be in what direction it might.

## CHAPTER IV.

AN ADVENTURE.—ANOTHER LETTER FROM MISS MORRISON PRODUCTIVE OF A POWERFUL EFFECT UPON HER BROTHER.—HE FORSAKES HIS CLIENT AND HIS FRIEND.—AGNES IS LEFT ALONE, AND EMPLOYS SOME OF HER LEISURE IN WRITING A LETTER TO MISS COMPTON.

THE following day was an eventful one. For the first time since they had been in London, Agnes, on seeing her aunt preparing to go out, asked permission to go with her, and "You may go if you will," was the answer; but before her bonnet was tied on, Mrs. Barnaby changed her mind, saying, "Put down your bonnet, Agnes.... upon second thoughts I don't choose to take you.... Look at all these things of mine lying about here!.... I have told you that it is likely enough we may set off by a night coach, and I have got, as you know, to go out with Mr. Morrison; so I should be

much obliged if you would please to tell me how all my packing is to get done?"

"If you would let me go with you now, aunt, I shall have plenty of time to do all that remains while you are out with Mr. Morrison," replied Agnes.

"Agnes, you are, without exception, the most impertinent and the most plaguing girl that ever a widowed aunt half ruined herself to provide for.... But I won't be bullied in this way either.... Stay at home, if you please, and do what I bid you, or before this time to-morrow you may be crying in the streets of London for a breakfast.... I should like to know who there is besides me in the wide world who would undertake the charge of you?.... Do you happen to know any such people, miss? .... If you do, be off to them if you please—the sooner the better;.... but if not, stay at home for once without grumbling, and do what you 're bid."

There was just sufficient truth mixed with the injustice of these harsh words to go to the heart of poor Agnes. Her aunt Compton, in reply

to a letter of Mrs. Barnaby, written in a spirit of wanton impertinence, and in which she made a formal demand of one hundred pounds a-year for the expenses of Agnes, answered in great wrath, that she and Agnes both had better take care not to change their residence so often as to lose a parish settlement, for they might live to find *that* a much better dependence than anything they would obtain from her. This pettish epistle, received the day before they left Silverton, was carefully treasured by Mrs. Barnaby, and often referred to when she was anxious to impress on her niece a sense of her forlorn condition and helpless dependence. So all hope from that quarter seemed to be for ever shut out .... And could she forget that even at the moment when the dangers of her situation had so forcibly struck Lady Elizabeth Norris, as to make her approve what she had before declared to be worse than *any home*,—that even at that moment she had explicitly declared that neither herself nor her niece could *take charge of her?*

These were mournful thoughts; and it was no great proof of Agnes's wisdom, perhaps, that,

instead of immediately proceeding to the performance of her prescribed task, she sat down expressly to ruminate upon them. But the meditation was not permitted to be long; for hardly had she rested her elbow upon the table, and her cheek upon her hand, in the manner which ladies under such circumstances always do, than she was startled by a violent knocking and simultaneous ringing at the street-door, followed, as soon as it was opened, by a mixture of two or three loud and angry voices, amidst which she clearly distinguished that of her aunt; and the moment after she burst into the room, accompanied by the gentleman who had appeared to admire her so greatly in the street the day before, together with two other much less well-looking personages, who stuck close upon the heels of Mrs. Barnaby, with more appearance of authority than respect.

"You shall live to repent this treatment of a lady," cried Mrs. Barnaby, addressing the hero of her yesterday's adventure, who was no other than the keeper of the livery-stable from whom she had hired the carriage and horses which

had dignified her existence for the last month. "You shall be taught to know what is due from a trumpery country tradesman like you, to a person of my fortune and station. What put it into your head, you vile fellow, instead of waiting my return to Cheltenham, to follow me to London in this abominable manner, and to arrest me in the public streets?"

"It is no difficult matter to tell you that, Mrs. Barnaby, if that's your name," replied the man; "and you'll find that I am not the only vile fellow holding himself ready to pay you the same compliment; though I, knowing the old saying 'first come, first served,' took some trouble to be the first."

"And do you really pretend to fancy, you pitiful creature," cried Mrs. Barnaby, in a voice in which terror and rage were struggling,— "do you really pretend to believe that I am not able to pay your twopenny-halfpenny bill a thousand times over?"

"Can't say indeed, ma'am," replied the man; "I shall not stand upon sending you to prison if you will discharge the account as here we

stand, paying fees and expenses of course, as is fitting .... Here are the items, neither many nor high.—

| | £. | s. | d. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Carriage and horses one month, twenty-five shillings per diem . . . . | 37 | 0 | 0 |
| Coachman's livery, board, and wages . . | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| Footman's ditto, hired to order . . . | 25 | 0 | 0 |
| | £ 82 | 0 | 0 |
| Deduct liveries, if returned . . | 12 | 0 | 0 |
| Remains . . | £ 70 | 0 | 0 |

And all our expenses and fees added won't make it above 77*l.* or 78*l.* altogether; so, ma'am, if you are the great lady you say, you won't find no great difficulty in giving me a write-off for the sum, and my good friends here shall stay while I run and get it cashed, after which I will be ready to make you my bow, and say good morning."

The anger of Mrs. Barnaby was not the less excited because what Mr. Simmons, the livery-stable keeper, said was true; and she seized with considerable quickness the feature of the case which appeared the most against him.

"Your vulgar mode of proceeding at Cheltenham, Mr. Simmons, is, I am happy to say, quite peculiar to yourselves; for though, for my age, I have lived a good deal in the world, I certainly never saw anything like it. Here have I, like a woman of fortune as I am, paid nobly, since I have been in your trumpery town, for every single thing for which it is customary to pay ready money; and when a job like yours, which never since the creation of the world was paid except from quarter to quarter, has run up for one month, down comes the stable-man post haste after me with a writ and arrest. I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself."

"I dare say I should, ma'am, you talking so fine as you do, if I hadn't nothing to put forward in return. I don't believe, Mrs. Barnaby, but what you, or any other rich-seeming lady like you, .... I don't believe but what any such might have come to Cheltenham, and have run up debts to the tune of a thousand pounds, and not one of us taken fright at it, provided the lady had stayed quiet and steady in the town, where one had one's eyes upon her, and was able

to see what she was about. But just do now look at the difference. 'The season's pretty fullish,' says one, 'and trade's brisk!....' 'That's true,' says another, 'only some's going off, and that's never a good sign, specially if they go without paying....' 'And who's after that shabby trick?' says another:.... 'Neither more nor less than the gay widow Barnaby!' is the answer.... 'The devil she is!' says one; 'she owes me twenty pounds....'—'I hope you are out there neighbour,' says another, 'for she owes me thirty.... 'And me ten'—'and me fifty'—'and me nineteen'—'and me forty,' and so on for more than I'll number. And what, pray, is the wisest among them likely to do in such a case? Why, just what your humble servant has done, neither more nor less."

"And what right have you, audacious man! to suppose that I have any intention of not returning, and paying all I owe, as I have ever and always done before?"

"Nothing particular, except your just saying, ma'am, that you should be back in two

days, and nevertheless not making yourself be heard of in ten, and your rooms kept, and your poor maid kept in 'em all the time too."

"This man talks like one who knows not what a lady is," said Mrs. Barnaby, her eyes flashing, and her face crimson; "but I must beg to ask of you, sir," turning to one of the Bow-street officials, "whether I am not to have time allowed for sending to my lawyer, and giving him instructions to settle with this fellow here?"

"Why, by rights, ma'am, you should go to a sponging-house without loss of time, that we might get the committal made out, and all regular; but if you be so inclined as to make it worth while to my companion and me, I don't think we shall object to keeping guard over you here instead, while you send off for any friends you choose to let into the secret."

"The friends I shall send to are my men of business, fellow!" replied Mrs. Barnaby, with the strongest expression of disdain that she could throw into her countenance. "You don't, I hope, presume to imagine that I would

send for any one of rank to affront them with the presence of such as you?"

"Fair words butter no parsnips, is a good saying and a true one; .... but I'll add to it, that saucy ones unlock no bolts; and if you expect to get out of this scrape by talking big, it's likely you may find yourself mistaken."

"A bill must be a good deal longer than this is, man, before the paying it will be much of a scrape to me," said the widow, affecting to laugh. "What a fool you are, Agnes," she continued, turning to the corner of the room into which the terrified girl had crept, "what a prodigious fool, to be sure, you must be, to sit there looking as white as a sheet, because an insolent tradesman chooses to bring in a bill of a month's standing, with a posse of thief-takers to back it.... Get up, pray, and bring my desk here .... I wish to write to my attorney."

In obedience to this command, Agnes rose from her chair, and attempted to cross the room to fetch the desk, which was at the other extremity of it; but not all her efforts to arouse her strength sufficed to overcome the sick faint-

ness which oppressed her. "Do, for God's sake, move a little faster, child," said Mrs. Barnaby; but Agnes failed in her habitual and meek obedience, not by falling into a chair, but by sitting down in one, conscious that her fainting at such a moment must greatly increase her aunt's embarrassment.

"I'll get the desk, miss," said one of the terrible men, in a voice so nearly expressive of pity, that tears started to her own eyes in pity of herself, as she thought how wretched must be the state of one who could inspire such a feeling in such a being; but she thanked him, and he placed the lady's desk before her—that pretty little rosewood desk that had been and indeed still was the receptacle of my Lord Mucklebury's flattering if not binding effusions; and as the thought crossed the brain of Mrs. Barnaby that she had hoped to make her fortune by these same idle papers, she felt for the very first time in her life, that perhaps, after all, she had not managed her affairs quite so cleverly as she might have done. It was a disagreeable idea; but even as she conceived it her

spirit rose to counteract any salutary effect such a notion might produce ; and with a toss of the head that indicated defiance to her own common sense, she opened her desk with a jerk, and began enditing an epistle to Mr. Magnus Morrison.

But this epistle, though it reached the lawyer in a reasonably short time after it was written, was not the first he received that day, .... for the Cheltenham post had brought him the following :

"Dear Brother,

"Don't blame me if the gay widow I introduced to you the week before last, should prove to be a *flam*, as my dear father used to call it.... I am sorry to say there are great suspicions of it going about here. She left us telling everybody that she should be back in two days ; and it is now more than ten since she started, and no soul has heard a word about her since. This looks odd, and bad enough, you will think ; but it is not the worst part of the story, I 'm sorry to say, *paw de too*, as you

shall hear. When she first came to Cheltenham she took very good rooms .... a separate drawing-room, which always looks well .... and dress, and all that, quite corresponding, but no servants nor carriage, nor anything of the high-flying kind.... Now observe, Magnus, what follows, and then I think that you will come to a right notion of what sort of person you have got to deal with. No sooner did Mrs. Barnaby get acquainted with Lord Mucklebury then she set off living at the rate of some thousands a-year ; and the worst is, as far as I am concerned, that she coaxed me to go round bespeaking and ordering everything for her. I know you will tell me, Magnus, that my father's daughter ought to have known better, and so I ought ; but, upon my word, she took me in so completely that I never felt a single moment's doubt about the truth of all she said.... And I believe, too, that the superior sort of elegant look of that beautiful Miss Willoughby went for something with me. Having told you all this, it won't be necessary, I fancy, to say much more in respect to putting you on

your guard.... Of course, you will take care to do nothing in the way of standing bail, or anything of that sort....*paw see bate*, you will say. All Cheltenham is talking about it; and I was told at breakfast this morning that Simmons, who furnished the carriage, horses, and servants, is gone to London to look after her; and that Wright the mercer, and several others, talk of doing the same. *Too sell aw man we;* but it can't be helped.... So many people, too, come to me for information, just as if I knew any more about her than anybody else at the boarding table.... That queer Lady Elizabeth Norris sent for me yesterday, begging I would call upon her; and when I got there I found it was for nothing in the world but to ask me questions about this Mrs. Barnaby. And there was that noble-looking Colonel Hubert, who sat and listened to every word I uttered just as if he had been as curious an old woman as his aunt: *maize eel foe dear*, Magnus, that men are sometimes quite as curious as women.... However, they neither of them got much worth hearing out of me; and yet I almost thought at

one time that the high and mighty Colonel was writing down what I said, for he had got his gold pencil-case in his hand; and though it was on the page of a book that he seemed to be scribbling, I saw plain enough by his eye that he was listening to me. You know, brother, I am pretty sharp, and I have got a few presents out of this fly-away lady, let what will come of it. But I could not help thinking, Magnus,—and if it was in a printed book it would be called a *fine observation*,—I could not help thinking how such a vulgar feeling as curiosity spoils the elegance of the manners. Lady Elizabeth, who has often told me that I speak the most exquisite French she ever heard, and who always before yesterday seemed delighted to have the opportunity of conversing with me in this very genteel language, never said one word in it all the time I stayed; and once when, as usual, I spoke a few words, she looked as cross as a bear, and said, 'Be so good as to speak English just now, Miss Morrison.' Very impertinent, I thought, *may set eh gal.* Don't think the worse of me for this

unfortunate blunder.... Let me hear how you are going on, and believe me

"Your affectionate sister,

"Sarah Morrison."

Mr. Magnus Morrison had by no means recovered the blow given him by this most unpleasing news, when a note from Mrs. Barnaby to the following effect was put into his hands.

"My dear Sir,

"A most ridiculous, but also disagreeable circumstance, has happened to me this morning. A paltry little tradesman of Cheltenham, to whom I owe a few pounds, has taken fright because I did not return to my apartments there at the moment he expected me.... the cause of which delay you must be aware has been the great pleasure I have received from seeing London so agreeably.... However, he has had the incredible insolence to follow me with a writ, and I must beg you to come to me with as little delay as possible, as your bail,

I understand, will prevent my submitting to the indignity of being lodged in a prison during the interval necessary for my broker (who acts as my banker) to take the proper measures for supplying me with the trifling sum I want. In the hope of immediately seeing you,

"I remain, dear Sir,

"Most truly yours,

"MARTHA BARNABY."

Mr. Magnus Morrison was not "so quick," as it is called, as his sister Sarah, and in the present emergency felt totally unable to fabricate an epistle, or even to invent a plausible excuse for an absence, which he nevertheless finally determined should be eternal. He was ill-inspired when he took this resolution, for had he attended the lady's summons, he might, with little trouble, have made a more profitable client of her yet than often fell to his lot. But he was terror-struck at the word BAIL; and forgetting all the beef-steaks, cheese-cakes, porter, and black wine that he had swallowed at the widow's cost, he very cavalierly sent

word by the sheriff's officer, who had brought her note, that he was very sorry, but that it was totally out of his power to come.

On receiving this message, delivered, too, with the commentary of a broad grin, even Mrs. Barnaby turned a little pale; but she speedily recovered herself on recollecting how very easy and rapid an operation the selling out stock was; so, once more raising her dauntless eye, she said, with an assumption of dignity but little mitigated by this rebuff, .... "I presume you will let me wait in my own apartments till I can send to my broker?"

"Why, 'tis possible, ma'am, you see, that it may be totally out of his power too, like this t'other gentleman.... and we can't be kept waiting all day.... You 'll have a trifle to pay already for the obligingness we have shewn, and so you must be pleased to get ready without more ado."

"You don't mean to take me to prison, fellow, for this trumpery debt!"

"'Tis where ladies always do go when they keep carriages without paying for them, unless

indeed they have got husbands as can go for them; and as that don't seem to be your case, ma'am, we must really trouble you to make haste."

"Gracious Heaven!.... It is incredible!".... cried the widow, now really in an agony. "Why, fellow, I tell you I have thousands in the funds that I can sell out at an hour's warning!"

"So much the better, ma'am—so much the better for us all, as, in that case, we shall be sure to get our own at last; and if the thing can be settled so easily, it is quite beneath such a clever lady as you to make a fuss about lodging at the king's charge for a night or so.... Pray, miss, can you help the gentlewoman to put up a night-cap, and such like little comforts,.... not forgetting a small provision of ready money, if I might advise, for that 's what makes the difference between a bad lodging and a good one where we are going.... Dick.... run out and call a coach, will you?"

All further remonstrance proved useless; and

Mrs. Barnaby, alternately scolding and entreating, was forced at last to submit to the degradation of being watched by a bailiff's officer as she went to her chamber to prepare herself for this terrible change of residence. The most bitter moment of all, perhaps, was that in which she was told that she must go alone, for that they had no orders to permit the attendance of any one. It was only then that she felt, in some degree, the value of the gentle observant kindness which had marked every word and look of Agnes from the moment when—her first feeling of faintness over—she assiduously drew near her, put needle-work into her hands, set herself to the same employment, and, with equal ingenuity and sweet temper, contrived to make the long interval during which they had to endure the presence of two of the men, while the third was dispatched to Mr. Morrison, infinitely more tolerable than could have been hoped for. But on this point the officials were as peremptory as in the commands they reiterated that she should get ready, promising, however, that application should be made for

leave to let the young lady be with her, if she liked it.

"You may save yourselves the trouble, brutes as you are," cried Mrs. Barnaby, as, with something very like a sob, she returned the kiss of Agnes. "I 'll defy you to keep me in your vile clutches beyond this time to-morrow .... Take care that this letter is put into the post directly, Agnes; but I will give it to the maid myself.... It will reach my broker by four or five o'clock, I should think; and I 'll answer for his not neglecting the business; but it may, however, be near dinner-time before I get back—so don't be frightened, my dear, if it is; and here is the key of the money-drawer, you know, if you want to pay anything."

"Better divide the money drawer with the young lady, at any rate," said one of the men, laughing.

"That you may pick my pockets, perhaps?" replied the vexed prisoner.

"Have you enough money with you, aunt?" whispered Agnes in her ear.

"Plenty, my dear; and more than I 'll

spend upon them, depend upon it," she replied aloud.... This drew on a fresh and not very gentle declaration that they must be gone directly; and the unlucky Mrs. Barnaby, preceded by one and followed by two attendants, descended the stairs, and mounted the hackney-coach.

It was then that Agnes for the first time began to understand and feel the nature of her own situation. Alone, utterly alone in lodgings in the midst of London, totally ignorant of the real state of her aunt's affairs, and, unhappily, so accustomed to hear her utter the most decided falsehoods upon all subjects, that nothing she had said on this gave her any confidence in the certainty either of her speedy return, or of her being immediately able to settle all claims upon her. What, then, was it her duty to do? During the first few moments of meditation on her desolate condition, she thought that the danger of being taken abroad could not have been greater than that which had now fallen upon her, and consequently that Lady Elizabeth would be ready to extend to

her the temporary shelter she had told her to claim, in case of what then appeared the worst necessity. But a very little calmer reflection made her shrink from this; and the fact that Colonel Hubert was now with her, which, under other circumstances, would have made such an abode, if enjoyed only for a day or two, the dearest boon that Providence could grant her, now caused her to decide, with a swelling heart, that she would not accept it.

The nature and degree of the disgrace which her aunt had now brought upon her was so much worse than all that either her vanity or her coquetry had hitherto achieved, that she felt herself incalculably more beneath him than ever, and felt during these dreadful moments that she would rather have begged her bread back to Empton, than have met the doubtful welcome of his eye upon seeing her under such circumstances.

This thought of Empton recalled the idea of the person whose liberal kindness had for years bestowed on her this only home that she had ever loved. Was it possible, that if made

acquainted with her present deplorable situation, she could refuse to extend some sort of protection to one whose claim upon her she had formerly acknowledged so freely, and who had never forfeited it by any act of her own? .... "I will write to her!" said Agnes, suddenly rousing herself, as it occurred to her that she was now called upon to act for herself. "God knows," thought she, "what my unfortunate and most unwise aunt Barnaby may have written or said to provoke her; but now, at least, without either rebellion or deceit, I may myself address her."

This idea generated a hope that seemed to give her new life, and with a rapid pen she wrote as follows:

"I CAN hardly dare to expect that a letter from one whom you have declared you never would see again should be very favourably received; and yet, my dear aunt Betsy (permit me once more to call you so), how can I believe that the same person who took such generous pity on my miserable ignorance six years ago

would, without any fault on my part, permit me to fail in my hope of turning the education she bestowed into a means of honourable existence, and that solely from the want of her protection? Alas! aunt Compton, I am most miserably in want of protection now. My aunt Barnaby, of whose pecuniary affairs I, in truth, know nothing, was this morning arrested and taken away to prison for debt. Her style of expense has been very greatly increased during the last few weeks, and I have reason to believe that she entertained a hope of being married to a nobleman, with whom she made acquaintance at Cheltenham, but who left it, about a fortnight ago, without taking any leave of her. I am not much in her confidence; but she has so repeatedly mentioned before me her determination to be revenged on this Lord Mucklebury, as well as her certainty of recovering damages from him, that I have no doubt her coming to London was with a view to bringing an action for breach of promise of marriage. What confirms this is, that the only person we have seen is a lawyer; and the same spirit of conjecture,

which has made me guess what I have told you, leads me to suspect also, that this lawyer has persuaded her to give the project up; for not only do I hear no more of it, but she has seemed for the last week to be devoted wholly to seeing the sights of London in company with this lawyer. I have not accompanied them, not being very well, nor very happy in a mode of life so much less tranquil than what I have been used to at Empton.

"I tell you all these particulars, aunt Compton, that you may know exactly what my situation is. I am, at this moment, alone in a London lodging; my aunt Barnaby in prison; and with no little danger, as far as I am able to judge, that when she has settled this claim for her carriage and horses, many others may come upon her.

"My petition to you, therefore, is, that you would have the *great, great* goodness to permit my travelling back into Devonshire to put myself under your protection; not idly to become a burden to you, but that I might be so happy as to feel myself in a place of respectability

and safety till such time as my kind friend, Mrs. Wilmot, may hear of some situation as governess, or teacher at a school, such as she might think me fit for. I have very diligently kept up my reading and writing in French and Italian, with the hope of one day teaching both. They tell me, too, that I have a good voice for singing, as my poor mother had .... perhaps I might be able to teach that.

"I shall remain here (unless removed by my aunt Barnaby, of which I would give you notice) till such time as the Silverton post can bring me an answer. Have pity upon me, dear aunt Betsy! .... Indeed I want it as much now as when you found I could not read a line of English in your pretty bower at Compton Basett.

"How often I have thought of your flowers and your bees, aunt Betsy, and wished I could be there to wait upon them and upon you!

"Your dutiful and grateful niece,

"AGNES WILLOUGHBY."

"5, Half-Moon Street, Piccadilly, London."

Having finished this letter, Agnes completed one she had before been writing to Lady Stephenson, and then took her solitary way to a letter-box, of which she had learned the situation, at no great distance. She heard her important dispatch to Compton Basett drop into the box, with a conviction that her fate wholly depended on the manner in which it was received ; and having walked back as slowly as possible, that she might benefit by the mild western breeze that blew upon her feverish cheek, she remounted the dark stairs to the solitary drawing-room, totally incapable of enjoying that solitude, though it had so often appeared to her the one thing needful for happiness.

Happy was it for her that she had turned her thoughts to her aunt Compton ; for, uncertain as was the result of her application, there was enough of hope attached to it to save her from that feeling of utter desolation that must at this moment have been her portion without it. The more she thought of receiving aid from the pity of Colonel Hubert's family, the less

could she feel comfort from the idea. When it had been offered as a protection against the notice which they had imagined her likely to excite, it was soothing to all her feelings; but, required or accorded as mere ordinary charity, it was intolerable. A melancholy attempt at dining occupied a few minutes, and then hour after hour passed over her, slowly and sadly, till the light faded. But she had not energy for employment; not one of all her best-loved volumes could have fixed her attention for a moment. She called for no candles, but lying on the sofa, her aching head pillowed by her arm, she suffered herself to dwell on all the circumstances of her situation, which weighed most heavily upon her heart; and assuredly the one which brought the greatest pang with it was the recollection of having won the affection of Colonel Hubert's family, just at the moment when disgrace so terrible had fallen on her own, as to make her rather dread than wish to see him again.

## CHAPTER V.

AGNES RECEIVES AN UNEXPECTED VISITER, AND AN IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION. — SHE ALSO RECEIVES A LETTER FROM CHELTENHAM, AND FROM HER AUNT BARNABY.

Agnes was roused from this state of melancholy musing by a double knock at the door.

"Is it possible," she said, starting up, "that she spoke truly, and that she is already released?"

The street-door was opened, but the voice of Mrs. Barnaby did not make its way up the stairs before her — a circumstance so inevitable upon her approach, — that, after listening for it in vain for a moment, the desolate girl resumed her attitude, and endeavoured to recover the train of thought that had been broken. But she was not destined to do so, at least

for the present, for the maid threw open the drawing-room door, and announced "A gentleman."

Agnes, as we have said, was sitting in darkness, and the girl very judiciously placed her slender tallow-candle in its tin receptacle on the table, saying, as she set a chair for "the gentleman," "I will bring candles in a minute, miss," and then departed.

Agnes raised her eyes as the visiter approached, and had the light been feebler still she would have found no difficulty in discovering that it was Colonel Hubert who stood before her. He bowed to the angle of the most profound respect, and though he ventured to extend his hand in friendly greeting, he took hers with the air of a courtier permitted to offer homage to a sovereign princess.

Agnes stood up, she received his offered hand, and raised her eyes to his face, but uttered no word either of surprise or joy. Her face was colourless, and traces of very recent tears were plainly visible; she trembled from head to foot, and Colonel Hubert, frightened, as a

brave man always is when he sees a woman really sinking under her sex's weakness, replaced her on the sofa almost as incapable of speaking as herself.

"Do not appear distressed at seeing me, dearest Miss Willoughby," said he, "or I shall be obliged to repent having ventured to wait on you. I should not have presumed to do this, had not your friends, your truly attached friends, my aunt and sister, authorized my doing so."

"Oh! what kindness!" exclaimed poor Agnes, bursting into a flood of most salutary tears. "Do not think me ungrateful, Colonel Hubert, if I could not say.... if I did not speak to you.... Do you, indeed, come to me from Lady Elizabeth?"

"Here are my credentials," he replied, smiling, and presenting a letter to her. "We learned that your foolish aunt.... forgive me, Miss Willoughby; but the step I have taken can only be excused by explaining it with the most frank sincerity.... we learned that Mrs. Barnaby, having quitted Cheltenham suddenly,

(the ostensible reason for doing which was bad enough), had left a variety of debts unpaid; and that her creditors, alarmed at her not returning, were taking active measures to secure her person.... Is this true?.... Is your aunt arrested?"

"She is," replied Agnes faintly.

"Good God!... You are here, then, entirely alone?"

"I am quite alone," was the answer, though it was almost lost in the sob that accompanied it.

"Oh! dearest Agnes!" cried Colonel Hubert, in a burst of uncontrolable emotion, "I cannot see you thus, and longer retain the secret that has been hidden in my heart almost from the first hour I saw you!.... I love you, Agnes, beyond all else on earth!... Consent to be my wife, and danger and desertion shall never come near you more!"

What a moment was this to hear such an avowal!..... Human life can scarcely offer extremes more strongly marked of weal and woe than those presented by the actual position

of Agnes, and that proposed to her by the man she idolized. But let De la Rochefoucault say what he will, there are natures capable of feeling something nobler than the love of self; .... and after one moment of happy triumphant swelling of the heart that left no breath to speak, she heaved a long deep sigh that seemed to bring her back from her momentary glimpse of an earthly paradise to things as they are, and said slowly, but with great distinctness, "No! never will I be your wife! .... never, by my consent, shall Colonel Hubert ally himself to disgrace!"

Had this been said to a younger man, it is probable that he would not have found in it anything calculated to give a mortal wound to his hopes and wishes; but it fell with appalling coldness on the heart of the brave soldier, who had long kept Cupid at defiance by the shield of Mars, and who had just made the first proposal of marriage that had ever passed his lips. It was her age and his own that rose before him as she uttered her melancholy "No, never!" .... and Agnes became

almost the first object to whom he had ever, even for a moment, been unjust. He gave her no credit.... no, not the least, for the noble struggle that was breaking her heart, and meant most sincerely what he said, when he replied,—

"Forgive me, Miss Willoughby.... Had I been a younger man, the offer of my hand, my heart, my life, would not have appeared to you, as it doubtless must do now,—the result of sober, staid benevolence, desirous of preserving youthful innocence from unmerited sorrow.... Such must my love seem.... So let it seem; .... but it shall never cost one hour's pain to you." .... He was silent for a moment, and had to struggle, brave man as he was, against feelings whose strength, perhaps, only shewed his weakness.... "But even so," he added, making a strong effort to speak steadily, "even so; let me not be here in vain: listen to me as a friend and father."

Poor Agnes! .... this was a hard trial. To save him, worshipped as he was, from a marriage that must be considered as degrading, she

could have sacrificed herself with the triumphant courage of a proud martyr, but to leave him with the idea that she was too young to love him! .... to let that glowing, generous heart sink back upon itself, because it found no answering warmth in her! .... in her! who would have died only to purchase the right of owning that she never did, and never could, love any man but him! .... It was too terrible, and the words "Hubert! beloved Hubert!" were on her lips; but they came no farther, for she had not strength to speak them. Another effort might have been more successful, and they, or something like them, might have found way, had not the gentleman recovered his voice first, and resumed the conversation in a tone so chillingly reserved, that the timid, broken-spirited girl, had no strength left "to prick the sides of her intent," and lay her innocent heart open before him.

"In the name of Lady Elizabeth Norris let me entreat you, Miss Willoughby, not to remain in a situation so every way objectionable," he said. "My aunt and sister both are

full of painful anxiety on your account, and the letter I have brought contains their earnest entreaties that you should immediately take up your residence with my aunt. Do not refuse this from any fear of embarrassment .... of persecution from me.... I shall probably go abroad.... I shall probably join my friend Frederick at Paris. He did you great justice, Miss Willoughby; .... and, but for me, perhaps .... Forgive me !.... I will no longer intrude on you !—forgive me !—tell me you forgive me, for all the pain I have caused you, and for more injury, perhaps, than you will ever know! I never knew how weak—I fear I should say how unworthy—my character might become, till I knew you; .... and to complete the hateful retrospect," he added, with bitterness, and rising to go, "to complete the picture of myself that I have henceforth to contemplate, I was coxcomb enough to fancy.... But I am acting in a way that I should scorn a youth for who numbered half my years.... Answer my aunt's letter, Miss Willoughby .... answer it as if her contemptible

nephew did not exist .... he shall exist no longer where he can mar your fortune or disturb your peace!"

Agnes looked at him as if her heart would break at hearing words so harsh and angry, when, losing at once all sense of his own suffering, Colonel Hubert reseated himself, and, in the gentlest accent of friendship, alluded to the propriety of her immediately leaving London, and to the anxiety of her friends at Cheltenham to receive her.

"They are very, *very* good to me," said Agnes meekly; "and I shall be most thankful, Colonel Hubert, to avail myself of such precious kindness, if the old aunt, to whom I have written, in Devonshire, should refuse to save me from the necessity of being a burden on their benevolence."

"But shall you wait for this decision here, Miss Willoughby?"

"I have promised to do so," replied Agnes; "and as I may have an answer here on Thursday, I think, at latest, I would not risk the danger of offending her by putting it out

of my power immediately to obey her commands, if she should be so kind as to give me any."

The eyes of Agnes were fixed for a moment on his as she concluded this speech, and there was something in the expression of that look that shook the sternness of his belief in her indifference. He rose again, and making a step towards her, said, with a violence of emotion that entirely changed the tone of his voice,—

"Agnes!.... Miss Willoughby!.... answer me one question.... Should my aunt herself plead for me.... could you, would you, be my wife?"

Agnes, equally terrified lest she should say too little or too much, faltered as she replied, "If it were possible, Colonel Hubert.... could I indeed believe that your aunt, your sister, would not hate and scorn me...."

"You might!.... You will let me believe it possible you could be brought to love me?.... To love me, Agnes?.... No! do not answer me.... do not commit yourself by a

single word ! . . . . Stay, then, here ; . . . . but do not leave the house ! . . . . Stay till . . . . Yet, alas ! I dare not promise it ! . . . . But you will not leave this house, Miss Willoughby, with any aunt, without letting me . . . . my family, know where you may be found ?"

" Oh no ! . . . ." said Agnes with a reviving hope, that if they must be parted, which this reference to her aunt and his own doubtful words made it but too probable would be the end of all, at least it would not be because he thought she was too young to love him . . . . " Oh no !" she repeated ; " this letter will not be left without an answer."

" And you will not stir from these rooms alone ?" he replied, once more taking her hand.

" Not if you think it best," she answered, frankly giving hers, and with a smile, moreover, that ought to have set his heart at ease about her thinking him too old to love. And for the moment perhaps it did so, for he ventured to press a kiss upon that hand, and uttering a fervent " Heaven bless and guard you !" disappeared.

And Agnes then sat down to muse again. But what a change had now come o'er the spirit of her dream! .... Where was her abject misery? Where the desolation that had made her almost fear to look around and see how frightfully alone she was? Her bell was rung, her candles brought her, tea was served; and though there was a fulness and palpitation at the heart which prevented her taking it, or eating the bread and butter good-naturedly intended to atone for her untasted dinner, quite in the tranquil, satisfactory, and persevering manner that might have been wished, everything seemed to dance before her eyes *en coleur de rose*, till at last, giving up the attempt to sit soberly at the tea-table, she rose from her chair, clasped her hands with a look of grateful ecstasy to heaven, and exclaimed aloud, "He loves me! Hubert loves me! .... Oh, happy, happy Agnes!"

"Did you call, miss?" said the maid entering, from having heard her voice as she passed up the stairs.

Agnes looked at her and laughed. "No,

Susan," she replied; "I believe I was talking to myself."

"Well, that is funny," said the girl; "and I 'm sure it is a pity such a young lady as you should have no one else to talk to. Shall I take the things away, miss?"

Once more left to herself, Agnes set about reading the letter, which hitherto had lain untouched upon the table, blushing as she opened it now, because it had not been opened before.

The first page was from Lady Elizabeth, and only expressed her commands, given in her usual peremptory tone, but nevertheless mixed with much kindness, that Agnes should leave London with as little delay as possible, and consider her house as her home till such time as an eligible situation could be found, in which her own excellent talents might furnish her with a safer and more desirable manner of existence than any her aunt Barnaby could offer. The remainder of the letter was filled by Lady Stephenson, and expressed the most affectionate anxiety for her welfare; but she too referred to the hope of being able to find some situation

that should render her independent; so that it was sufficiently evident that neither of them as yet had any idea that this independence might be the gift of Colonel Hubert.

"It is nonsense to suppose they will ever consent to it," thought Agnes; and this time her spirits were not so exalted as to make her breathe her thoughts aloud; "but I never can be so miserable again as I have been .... it is enough happiness for any one person in this life .... that everybody says is not a happy one .... it is quite enough to know that Hubert loves me .... Oh Hubert! .... noble Hubert! how did I dare to fix my fancy on thee? .... Presumptuous! .... But yet he loves me!"

And with this balm, acting like a gentle opiate upon her exhausted spirits, she slept all night, and dreamed of Hubert.

The four o'clock delivery of the post on the following day brought her this letter from her aunt Barnaby

"Dear Agnes,

"The brutality of these Cheltenham people

is perfectly inconceivable. Mr. Crayton my broker, and my poor father's broker before me, came to me as early as it was possible last night; and I explained to him fully, and without a shadow of reserve, the foolish scrape I had got into, which would have been no scrape at all if I had not happened to fall into the hands of a parcel of rascals. He undertook to get the sum necessary to release me by eleven o'clock this morning, which he did, good man, with the greatest punctuality .... paid that villanous Simmons, got his receipt, and my discharge, when, just at the very moment when I was stepping into the coach that was to take me from this hateful place, up come the same two identical fellows that insulted us in Half-Moon Street, and arrest me again at the suit of Wright .... Such nonsense! .... As if I could not pay them all ten times over, as easy as buy a pot of porter. But they care no more for reason than a pig in a sty; so here I am, shut up again till that dear old man Crayton can come, and get through all the same tedious work again. You can't conceive how miserably dull

I am; and what's particularly provoking, I gave over trying to have you in with me as soon as old Crayton told me I should be out by noon to-day; and therefore, Agnes, I want you to set off the very minute you receive this, and come to me for a visit. You may come to me for a visit, though I can't have you in without special leave. Mind not to lose your way; but it's uncommonly easy if you will only go by what I say. Set out the same way that we went to the church, you know, and keep on till you get to the Haymarket, which you will know by its being written up. Then, when you've got down to the bottom of it, turn sharp round to your left, and just ask your way to the Strand; and when you have got there, which you will in a minute, walk on, on, on, till you come to the bottom of a steep hill, and then stop and ask some one to shew you the way to the Fleet Prison. When you get there, any of the turnkeys will be able to shew you to my room; and a comfort I'm sure it will be to see you in such a place as this.... And do, Agnes, buy as you come along half a

dozen cheesecakes and half a dozen queencakes, and a small jar, for about four or five shillings, of brandy cherries .... And what 's a great comfort, I may keep you till it 's dark, which is what they call shutting-up time, and then you can easy enough find your way back again by the gaslight, which is ten times more beautiful than day, all along the streets from one end of the town to the other. .... Only think of that dirty scoundrel Morrison never coming near me .... after all that passed too, and all the wine he drank, shabby fellow ! .... There is one very elegant-looking man here that I meet in the passage every time I go to my bedroom. He always bows, but we have not spoken yet. Bring five sovereigns with you, and be sure set off the moment you get this.

" Your affectionate aunt,

" Martha Barnaby."

It needs not to say the sort of effect which the tone of this letter produced on a mind in itself delicate and unsunned as the bells of the valley lily, and filled to overflowing with the

image of the noble Hubert. Yet there were other feelings that mingled with this deep disgust; she pitied her aunt Barnaby, and could any decent or womanly exertion have done her good, or even pleasure, she would not have shrunk from making it. But what she asked was beyond her power to perform; and, moreover, she had promised Colonel Hubert not to leave the house. How dear to her was the recollection of this injunction! .... how delightful the idea that his care and his commands protected her from the horrors of such a progress as that sketched out by her aunt Barnaby. To obey her was therefore altogether out of the question; but she sat down to write to her, and endeavoured to soften her refusal by pleading her terror of the streets at any hour, and her total want of strength and courage to undertake such an expedition; adding, that she supposed by her account there could be no doubt of their meeting in Half-Moon Street on the morrow.

But the morrow and its morrow came, without bringing Mrs. Barnaby. In fact, writ after

writ had poured in upon her, but hoping still to evade those yet to come, she only furnished herself with what each one required, and so prolonged her imprisonment to the end of the week. Her indignation at Agnes's refusal to come to her was excessive, and she answered her letter by a vehement declaration that she would never again inhabit the same house with her. This last epistle ended thus:—

"If you don't wish to be turned neck and heels into the street the moment I return, look out for a nursery-maid's or a kitchen-maid's place if you will .... only take care never to let me set eyes upon you again. Ungrateful wretch! .... What is Morrison's ingratitude to yours? For nearly seven months you have eaten at my cost, been lodged at my cost, travelled at my cost, ay, and been clothed at my cost too. And what is the return? .... I am in prison for debts, which, of course, were incurred as much for you as for myself; and you refuse to come to me! .... Never let me see you more—never let me hear your name,

and never again turn your thoughts or hopes to your for ever offended aunt,

"MARTHA BARNABY."

Little as Agnes wished to continue under the protection of Mrs. Barnaby, this peremptory dismissal was exceedingly embarrassing. She had declined immediately accepting the invitation of Lady Elizabeth in a manner that made her very averse to throwing herself upon it, till a positive refusal of assistance from her aunt Compton obliged her to do so; and being absolutely penniless (excepting inasmuch as she was entrusted with the key that secured the widow's small stock of ready money), her only mode of not undergoing, to the letter, the sentence which condemned her to wander in the streets, was remaining where she was till she received an answer from Miss Compton.

It is certain that she submitted to thus seizing upon hospitality with the strong hand the more readily, as by doing so she was enabled to obey the parting injunction of Colonel Hubert; and bracing her courage to

the meeting that must take place should Mrs. Barnaby's release precede her own, she suffered the heavy interval of doubt to steal away with as little of the feverish restlessness of impatience as possible.

## CHAPTER VI.

AGNES RECEIVES ANOTHER UNEXPECTED VISIT. — MRS. BARNABY RETURNS TO HER LODGINGS AND CATCHES THE VISITER THERE.

The seven or eight months elapsed since the reader parted from Miss Compton, passed not over the head of the secluded spinster as lightly as the years which had gone before .... for her conscience was not quite at rest. For some time the vehemence of the indignation and disgust excited by Mrs. Barnaby, during their last interview, sustained her spirits, much as a potent but noxious dram might have done; and during this time the fact of Agnes being her inmate and companion, was quite sufficient to communicate such a degree of contamination to her, as made the choleric old lady turn from all thought of her with most petulant dislike.

The letter of Mrs. Barnaby, demanding an allowance for Agnes, reached her just when all this violence was beginning to subside, and acting like turpentine on an expiring flame, made her anger and hatred rage again with greater fury than ever. This demand was refused, as we have seen, in the harshest manner possible, and the writing this insulting negative was a considerable relief to the spinster's feelings. But when this was done, and all intercourse, as it should seem, finally closed between herself and the only human being concerning whom she was capable of feeling any lively interest, her anger drooped and faded, and her health and spirits drooped and faded too. She remembered, when it was too late, that it was not Agnes's fault that she was living with Mrs. Barnaby; and conscience told her, that if she had come forward, as she might and ought to have done, at the time of her brother's death, the poor child might have been saved from the chance of any moral resemblance to the object of her aversion, however much she might unhappily inherit the

detestable Wisett beauty. Then, too, came the remembrance of the beautiful vision, whose caresses she had rejected when irritated almost to madness by the tauntings of Mrs. Barnaby; and the idea that the punishment allotted to her in this world for this flagrant act of injustice, was the being doomed never to behold that fair young creature more, lay with a daily increasing weight of melancholy on her spirits.

It was on the afternoon of a fine September day that the letter of Agnes reached her. As usual, she was sitting in her bower, and her flowers bloomed and her bees hummed about her as heretofore, but the sprightly black eye that used to watch them was greatly dimmed. She had almost wholly lost her relish for works of fiction, and reading a daily portion of the Bible, which she had never omitted in her life, was perhaps the only one of all her comfortable habits that remained unchanged.

It would be no easy matter to paint the state into which the perusal of Agnes's letter threw her. Self-reproach was lost in the sort

of ecstasy with which she remembered how thriftily she had hoarded her wealth, and how ample were the means she possessed to give protection and welcome to the poor orphan who thus sought a refuge in her bosom. All the strength and energy she had lost seemed to rush back upon her as her need called for them, . . . . and there was more of courage and enterprize within that diminutive old woman than always falls to the lot of a six-foot-two dragoon.

Her resolution as to what she intended to do was taken in a moment, and without any weakening admixture of doubts and uncertainties as to when and how; but she knew that she should want her strength, and must therefore husband it. Her step was, therefore, neither hurried nor unsteady as she returned to the house, and mounted to her sitting-room. The first thing she did on entering it was to drink a glass of water, the next to endite a note to the postmaster at Silverton, ordering a chaise and four horses to be at Compton Basett by daybreak to take her the first stage

towards London. She then rang her bell, gave her note to Peggy Wright, the farmer's youngest daughter, who was her constant attendant, and bade her request that her father, if in the house, would come to her immediately. There was enough in the unusual circumstances of a letter received, and a note sent, to excite the good farmer's curiosity, and he was in the presence of his landlady as quickly as she could herself have wished.

"Sit down, Farmer Wright," said Miss Compton, and the farmer seated himself.

"I must leave Compton Basett to-morrow morning, Farmer Wright," she resumed. "My niece—my great niece, I mean, Miss Willoughby, has written me a letter, which determines me to go to London immediately for the purpose of taking charge of her myself."

"Sure-ly, Miss Compton, you bean't goen' to set off all by your own self for Lunnun?" exclaimed the farmer.

"Not if I can manage before night to get a couple of servants to attend me."

Farmer Wright stared; there was something quite new in Miss Betsy's manner of talking.

"You are a very active man, farmer, in the haymaking season," continued Miss Compton with a smile; "do you think, that to oblige and serve me, you could be as much on the alert for the next three or four hours as if you had a rick to save from a coming storm of rain?"

"That I wool!" replied Wright heartily. "Do you but bid me do, Miss Betsy, and I 'll do it."

"Then go to your sister Appleby's, and inquire if her son William has left Squire Horton's yet."

"I need not go so far for that, Miss Compton; Will is down stairs with my missus at this very minute," said the farmer.

"That is fortunate!.... He is not likely to go away directly, is he?"

"No, not he, Miss Betsy; he is come to have a crack with our young 'uns, and it 's

more likely he 'll stay all night than be off in such a hurry."

"Then, in that case, have the kindness, Farmer Wright, to saddle a horse, while I write a line to the bank.... I want you to ride over to Silverton for me, to get some money."

"And I 'll do it," replied her faithful assistant, leaving the room.

Fortunately for her present convenience, Miss Compton always kept a deposit of about one hundred pounds in the bank at Silverton in case of need, either for the purpose of making the loans which have been already mentioned as a principal feature in her works of charity, or for any accidental contingency. Beyond this, however, she had no pecuniary transactions there, as her habitual secrecy in all that concerned her money affairs made it desirable that her agent should be more distant. This fund, however, was quite sufficient for the moment, for, as will be easily believed, Miss Compton had no debts.

Farmer Wright speedily re-appeared, equipped for his ride.

"You will receive ninety-seven pounds sixteen and two-pence, Wright," said the spinster, giving her draught.

"Would it suit you best to receive the rent, Miss Betsy, before you set off?" said the farmer. "It will make no difference, you know, ma'am, if I pays it a fortnight beforehand."

"Not an hour, upon any account, Wright," replied his punctilious landlady. "I will leave written instructions with you as to what you are to do with it, and about all my other affairs in which you are concerned. And now send William Appleby to me."

This young man, the nephew of her tenant, and the ex-footman of a neighbouring family, had been favourably known to her from his childhood; and a very few minutes sufficed to enrol him as her servant, with an understanding that his livery was to be ordered as soon as they reached London.

This done, Mrs. Wright was next desired

to attend her; and with very little waste of time or words, it was agreed between them, that if "father" made no objection, (which both parties were pretty sure he would not,) Peggy should be immediately converted into a waiting-maid to attend upon herself and Miss Willoughby. This last arrangement produced an effect very likely to be destructive to all Miss Betsy's quiet, well-laid plans for preparation, for the news that Peggy was to set off next morning for London very nearly turned the heads of every individual in the house.

The mother of the family, however, so far recovered her senses as to appear again in Miss Compton's room at the end of an hour, but with a heated face, and every appearance of having been in great activity.

"I ax your pardon, Miss Betsy, a thousand times!" said the good woman, wiping her face; "but Peggy's things, you know, Miss Compton, can't be like yours, all nicely in order in the drawers; and we must all wash and iron too before she can be ready. But here I am now

to help you, and I can get your trunk ready in no time."

"I shall take very little with me, Mrs. Wright," replied the old lady, who seemed as much *au fait* of what she was about as if she had been in the habit of visiting London every year of her life; "nor must Peggy take much," she added gently, but with decision; "and getting her things washed and ironed must be done after we are gone. I shall let you know as soon as I can where the luggage that must follow us, shall be addressed; and instead of washing and ironing, Mrs. Wright, I want you and one of the elder girls to assist me in making an inventory of everything I leave behind .... orders concerning which you will also receive by the post."

Miss Compton, though a very quiet inmate, and one whose regular habits gave little trouble, was nevertheless a person of great importance at Compton Basett; and her commands, thus distinctly expressed, were implicitly obeyed; so that before the usual hour of retiring for the night, everything was arranged both for going

and staying exactly as she had determined they should be.

It was singular to see with what unvacillating steadiness this feeble-looking old lady pursued her purpose; no obstacle appeared of consequence sufficient to draw aside a thought from the main object she had in view, but was either removed or passed over by an impulse that seemed as irresistible as the steam that causes the train to rush along the rail-road, making the way clear, if it does not find it so.

At daybreak the Silverton post-chaise, with four good horses and two smart post-boys, were at the door; and within ten minutes afterwards all adieux had been spoken, all luggage stowed, and Miss Compton, who had never yet left her native county, was proceeding full gallop towards the metropolis.

"As you drive, so you will be paid," said William to the boys as they set off; and they did drive as boys so bargained with generally do. Miss Compton had shewn equal quickness and good judgment in having secured the services of this William, for he had repeatedly

travelled with his late master and mistress to London, was apt, quick, and intelligent; and fully justified the expectation his new lady had formed, that, with *carte blanche* in the article of expense, he would manage her journey as expeditiously, and with as little trouble to herself, as if she had been attended with half a dozen outriders.

At Exeter she dined, and reposed herself for a couple of hours, during which William undertook to hire a carriage for the journey, furnished with a dickey behind, and all other conveniences; an arrangement which greatly lessened the fatigue to all parties, and enabled the active-minded old lady to proceed as far as Salisbury that night. Daybreak again found her *en route;* and by means of William's conditional mode of payment to the postilions, Miss Compton arrived at Ibertson's Hotel by two o'clock in the afternoon.

It might be supposed, from the exertion used to reach the wide city in which she knew poor Agnes stood alone, that Miss Compton would drive directly to Half-Moon Street, and save her, as early as possible, from all farther

anxiety; but such was not her plan .... There was something still wanting to prove her repentance and her love, before she could present herself before the forsaken Agnes. All her schemes, all her wishes, were explained to her efficient aide-de-camp; and while she and the wondering Peggy reposed themselves, he was sent in search of handsome private lodgings, which must be such as his master the member for Silverton might have approved for his own family .... And then he was to proceed to livery-stables where he was known, and hire for her, by the week, a carriage and horses *fit for ladies to use.* Such were Miss Compton's vague, but very judicious orders; and the result was, that by the time she had dined and taken an hour's nap upon the sofa, a very respectable equipage was at the door awaiting her orders. In and about this the light luggage she had brought with her was arranged, and ten minutes' drive brought her to handsome, airy lodgings, near the top of Wimpole Street, where William thought he should be able to breathe himself, and where his mistress and Peggy, new as they were to the smoke and

dust, might have as good a chance of doing so too as in any other street he could think of.

Miss Compton was pleased, greatly pleased, with her new confidant's promptitude and ability. The carriage pleased her, the horses, the coachman, the house, the furniture, and the obsequious landlady too, all pleased her; and she felt a degree of happiness as she set her Peggy to make arrangements for the especial comfort and accommodation of Agnes, such as she had never known before. It cured all fatigue, it overpowered every feeling of strangeness in her new and most unwonted abode, and gave a gaiety to her spirits, and lightness to her heart, that made her look, as she stepped from room to room, like one of the little benignant old fairies of which we read in French story books.

By eight o'clock all her preparations were complete, the tea-things placed on the drawing-room table, Peggy given to understand that she was to consider herself more as Miss Willoughby's personal attendant than her own, and the carriage again at the door to convey

her to the longed-for yet almost dreaded meeting in Half-Moon Street.

Agnes had written to Miss Compton on Monday, and calculated that she might receive an answer to her letter on Thursday morning. But Thursday morning was past, and no letter arrived; and when about half-past eight on that same evening she heard a carriage stop, and the knocker thunder, the only idea that suggested itself was, that her aunt Barnaby was returned, and that she should have to plead for a night's lodging under her roof.

Her spirits were weakened by disappointment .... she had heard nothing from Cheltenham since Colonel Hubert's visit; and this, together with the non-arrival of any Devonshire letter, had caused a degree of depression to which she very rarely gave way.

"What shall I say to her? .... How shall I dare to meet her?" she exclaimed. "Oh! if she keeps her word, what, what will become of me?"

She heard steps approaching, and feeling convinced it was her aunt Barnaby, attempted in

her terror to open the door that communicated with the other room, but found it locked; and trembling like a hunted fawn, obliged to turn to bay, she cast her eyes towards the dreaded door, and saw Miss Compton gently and timidly entering by it.

"Aunt Betsy!" she cried, springing towards her, and falling involuntarily upon her knees, "Oh! dear, dear aunt Betsy!.... Is it indeed possible that you are come for me?"

The poor old lady's high-wrought energies almost failed her now; and had not a chair stood near, she would hardly have saved herself from falling on the floor beside her niece. "Agnes!.... poor child!" she said, "you thought I was too hard and too cruel to come near you?.... I have been much to blame.... oh! frightfully to blame!.... Will you forgive me, dear one?.... My poor pale girl!.... You look ill, Agnes, very, very ill.... And is it not a fitting torment for me to see this fair bloodless cheek?.... for did I not hate you for your rosy health?"

Agnes was indeed pale; and though not

fainting, was so near it, that while her aunt uttered this passionate address, she had no power to articulate a word. But she laid her cheek on the old lady's hands; and there was something so caressing and so helpless in her attitude as she did this, that poor Miss Compton was entirely overcome and wept aloud.

No sooner, however, had this first violent burst of emotion passed away, than the happiness such a meeting was calculated to afford to both of them, was most keenly and delightfully felt. Miss Compton looked at Agnes, as the blood beautifully tinged her delicate cheek again, with such admiration and delight, that it seemed likely enough, notwithstanding her strong good sense on many points, that she might now fall into another extreme, and idolize the being she had so harshly thrust from her .... while the object of this new and unhoped-for affection seemed to feel it at her very heart, and to be cheered and warmed by it, like a tender plant receiving the first beams of the morning sun after the chilling coldness of the night.

At length Miss Compton remembered that she was not come there only to look at Agnes; and withdrawing her arms, which she had thrown around her, she said .... "Come, my own child .... this is no roof for either of us. Have you much to remove? Is there more than a carriage can take, Agnes?"

"And will you take me with you now, aunt Betsy?" cried the delighted girl, springing up. "Wait but one moment, and all I have shall be ready .... it is not much .... My books are packed, and my trunk too .... the maid will help me."

"Ring the bell then, love, and let my servant take your packages down." Agnes obeyed .... her trunk .... aunt Betsy's original trunk, and the dear Empton book-box, were lodged on the driving-seat and the dickey of the carriage; and William was just mounting the stairs to say that all was ready, when another carriage was heard to stop, and another knocking resounded against the open street-door.

"Oh! it is aunt Barnaby!" cried Agnes in a voice of terror.

"Is it?" replied Miss Compton, in the lively tone of former days. "I shall be exceedingly glad to see her."

"Can you be in earnest, aunt Betsy?" said Agnes, looking very pale.

"Perfectly in earnest, my dear child," answered the old lady. "It will be greatly more satisfactory that she should be an eye-witness of your departure with me, than that you should go without giving her notice.... Perhaps she would say you had eloped and robbed the premises."

"Hush!...." cried Agnes.... "she is here!"

Mrs. Barnaby's voice, at least, was already with them. It was, indeed, the return of this lady which they had heard; and no sooner had she dismissed her hackney-coachman than she began questioning the servant of the house, who was stationed at the open door, expecting Miss Compton and her niece to come down.

"What carriage is that?... Whose servant

is that upon the stairs? .... You have not been letting the lodgings, I hope?" were the first words of the widow.

"Oh! dear no, ma'am!" replied the maid; "everything is just as you left it."

"Then who is that carriage waiting for?"

"For a lady, ma'am, who is come to call on your young lady."

"My young lady! .... unnatural hussy! .... And what fine friends has she found out here, I wonder, to visit her? .... Be they who they will, they shall hear my opinion of her." And with these words, Mrs. Barnaby mounted the last stair, and entered the room.

The two unsnuffed tallow candles which stood on the table did not enable her at the first glance to recognize her aunt, who was wrapped in a long silk cloak, much unlike any garment she had ever seen her wear; but the sable figure of Agnes immediately caught her eye, and she stepped towards her with her arm extended, very much as if about to box her ears. But it seemed that the action was only intended to intimate that she was instantly to depart, for,

with raised voice and rapid utterance, she said, "How comes it, girl, that I find you still here? .... Begone! .... Never will I pass another night under the same roof with one who could so basely desert a benefactress in distress! .... And who may this be that you have got to come and make merry with you, while I .... and for your expenses too....Whoever it is, they had better shew no kindness to you, .... or they will be sure to repent of it."

Mrs. Barnaby then turned suddenly round to reconnoitre the unknown visiter. "Do you not know me, Mrs. Barnaby?" said Miss Compton demurely.

"My aunt Betsy! ....Good God! ma'am, what brought you here?"

"I came to take this troublesome girl off your hands, Mrs. Barnaby: is not that kind of me?"

"That 's the plan, is it?" retorted the widow bitterly. "Now I understand it all. Instead of coming to comfort me in my misery, she was employing herself in coaxing another aunt to make a sacrifice of herself to her con-

venience. Take her; and when you are sick and sorry, she will turn her back upon you, as she has done upon me!"

"Oh! do not speak so cruelly, aunt Barnaby!" cried Agnes, greatly shocked at having her conduct thus described to one whose love she so ardently wished to gain.... "Tell my aunt Compton what it was you asked of me, and let her judge between us."

"Shut the door, Agnes!...." said Miss Compton sternly; and then, re-seating herself, she addressed Mrs. Barnaby with an air of much anxiety and interest: "Niece Martha, I must indeed beg of you to tell me in what manner this young girl has conducted herself since she has been with you, for, I can assure you, much depends upon the opinion I shall now form of her. I have no longer any reason to conceal from you that my circumstances are considerably more affluent than anybody but myself and my man of business is aware of.... Nearly forty years of strict economy, niece Martha, have enabled me to realize a very respectable little fortune. It was I, and not my tenant,

who purchased your poor father's moiety of Compton Basett; and as I have scarcely ever touched the rents, a little study of the theory of interest and compound interest will prevent your being surprised, when I tell you that my present income is fifteen hundred per annum, clear of all outgoings whatever."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnaby, with an accent and a look of reverence, which very nearly destroyed the gravity of her old aunt.

"Yes, Mrs. Barnaby," she resumed, "such is my income. With less than this, a gentlewoman of a good old family, desirous of bringing forward a niece into the world in such a manner as to do her credit, could not venture to take her place in society; and I have therefore waited till my increasing revenues should amount to this sum before I declared my intentions, and proclaimed my heiress. Such being the case, you will not be surprised that I should be anxious to ascertain which of my two nieces best deserves my favour. I do not mean to charge myself with both.... Let that

be clearly understood.... The doing so would entirely defeat my object, which is to leave one representative of the Compton Basett family with a fortune sufficient to restore its former respectability."

"And everybody must admire such an intention," replied Mrs. Barnaby, in an accent of inexpressible gentleness; "and I, for one, most truly hope, that whoever you decide to leave it to, may deserve such generosity, and have a grateful heart to requite it with."

"That is just what I should wish to find," returned the spinster; "and before you came in, I had quite made up my mind that Agnes Willoughby should be the person; but I confess, Mrs. Barnaby, that what you have said alarms me, and I shall be very much obliged if you will immediately let me know what Agnes has done to merit the accusation of having *deserted her benefactress?*"

"It is but too easy to answer that, aunt Compton," replied the widow, "and I am sorry to speak against my own sister's child; .... but truth is truth, and since you command

me to tell you what I meant when I said she had deserted me, I will.... I have been arrested, aunt Compton, and that for no reason on the earth but because I was tempted to stay three or four days longer in London than I intended. Of course, I meant to go back to that paltry place, Cheltenham, and pay every farthing I owed there, the proof of which is that I *have* paid every farthing, though it would have served them right to have kept them a year out of their money, instead of a month; ....but that 's neither here nor there.... though there was no danger of my staying in prison, I WAS there for three days, and Agnes could not tell but I might have been there for ever;.... yet, when I wrote her a most affectionate letter, begging her only to call upon me in my miserable solitude, she answered my petition, which might have moved a heart of stone, with a flat refusal.... Ask her if she can deny this?"

"What say you, Agnes?.... Is this so?" said the old lady, turning to the party accused.

"Aunt Betsy!".... said Agnes, and then

stopped, as if unwilling, for some reason or other, to say more.

"YES or NO?" demanded Mrs. Barnaby, vehemently. "Did you refuse to come to me, or not?"

"I did," replied Agnes.

"I hope you are satisfied, aunt Compton?" cried the widow triumphantly. . . . "By her own confession, you perceive that I have told you nothing but the truth."

Agnes said nothing in reply to this, but loosening the strings of a silk bag which hung upon her arm, she took from it a small packet, and placed it in the hands of Miss Compton. "What have we got here?" said the spinster sharply. . . . "What do you give me this for, child?"

"I wish you to read what is there, if you please, aunt," said Agnes. Miss Compton laid it on the table before her, while she sought for her spectacles and adjusted them on her nose; but, while doing this, she kept her eyes keenly fixed upon the little packet, and not without reason, for, had she turned from it for

a single instant, Mrs. Barnaby, who shrewdly suspected its contents, would infallibly have taken possession of it.

"My coachman and horses will get tired of all this, I think," said Miss Compton; "however, as you say, niece Martha, truth is truth, and must be sought after, even if it lies at the bottom of a well.... This is a letter, and directed to you, Miss Agnes;.... and this is the back of another, with some young-lady-like scrawling upon it.... Which am I to read first, pray?"

"The letter, aunt Betsy," replied Agnes.

"So be it," said the spinster with an air of great indifference; and drawing one of the candles towards her, and carefully snuffing it, she began clearly and deliberately reading aloud the letter already given, in which Mrs. Barnaby desired the presence of Agnes, and gave her instructions for her finding her way to the Fleet Prison. Having finished this, she replaced it quietly in its cover without saying a word, or even raising her eyes towards either of her companions; and taking the other paper, containing

Agnes's reasons for non-compliance, read that through likewise, exactly in the same distinct tone, and replaced, it with an equal absence of all commentary, in the cover. She then rose, and walking close up to her elder niece, who proffered not a word, looking in her face with a smile that must have been infinitely more provoking than the most violent indignation, said, "Niece Martha! .... the last time I saw you, if I remember rightly, you offered me some of your old clothes; but now you offer me none, which I consider as the more unkind, because, if you dressed as smart as you are now while in prison, you must most certainly wear very fine things when you are free .... And so, as you are no longer the kind niece you used to be, I don't think I shall come to see you any more. As for this young lady here, it appears to me that you have not been severe enough with her, Mrs. Barnaby .... I'll see if I can't teach her to behave better .... In prison or out of prison .... if I bid her come, we shall see if she dare look about her for such plausible reasons for refusing as she has given you. If she

does, I 'll certainly send her back to you, Mrs. Barnaby. Ring the bell, naughty Agnes !"

The maid seemed to have been very near the door, for it instantly opened. "Tell my servants that I am coming," said the whimsical spinster, enacting the fine lady with excellent effect ; and making a low, slow, and most ceremonious courtesy to the irritated, but perfectly overpowered Mrs. Barnaby, she made a sign to Agnes to precede her to the carriage, and left the room.

## CHAPTER VII.

AGNES ELOPES WITH HER AUNT BETSY.

"Is it possible!" cried Agnes, the moment that the door of the carriage was closed upon them, "is it possible that I am really under your protection, and going to your home, aunt Betsy?"

"To my temporary home, dear child, you are certainly going," said the old lady, taking her hand; "but I hope soon to have one more comfortable for you, my Agnes!"

"Where I shall find the bower and the bees? Is it not so, aunt?"

"Not exactly .... at least not at present .... But tell me, Agnes, don't you think I was very gentle and civil to Mrs. Barnaby?"

"It was certainly very wise not to reproach her, poor woman, more directly .... But, oh!

dearest aunt Betsy, how well you know her! .... If you had studied for a twelvemonth to find out how you might best have tormented her, you could have discovered no method so effectual as the making her first believe that you had a great fortune, and then that her own conduct had robbed her of your favour. Poor aunt Barnaby! .... I cannot help pitying her!"

"You are tender-hearted, my dear, .... and a flatterer too .... You give me credit, I assure you, for a vast deal more cleverness than I possess: excepting on the subject of the old clothes which she offered me when we met in the cottage of dame Sims, I attempted no jestings with her .... But tell me, Agnes, have you not suffered dreadfully from the tyranny and vulgar ignorance of this detestable woman? Has she not almost broken your young heart?"

"I have not been very happy with her, aunt Betsy," replied Agnes gently; .... "but she speaks only truth when she says I have lived at her cost, and this ought to close my lips against speaking more against her than may be

necessary to clear my own conduct in your eyes."

Perhaps the old lady was a little disappointed at finding that she was to have no good stories concerning the absurdities of the apothecary's high-flying widow, as she called her; but, despite all the oddities of Miss Compton, there was quite enough of the innate feeling of a gentlewoman within her to make her value Agnes the more for her promised forbearance. She threw her arm round her, and pressing her to her bosom, said,—

"Let this feeling of Christian gentleness be extended to me also, Agnes, .... for I have great need of it. This Martha Wisett the second, poor soul, was the first-born of her mother, and seems to have taken as her birthright all the qualities, bodily and mental, of her vulgar and illiterate dam .... But I have no such excuse, my child, for the obstinate prejudice with which my heart has been filled, and my judgment absolutely confounded. All you have suffered with this woman, Agnes, ought, in truth, to be laid to my charge .... I knew what she was, and yet I suffered you .... Let us

try to forget it; and only remember, if you can, that I turned away from you for no other reason upon earth than because I feared you were not .... exactly what I now find you. But here we are at home. How greatly must you want the healing feeling that home should bring! Poor dear! .... When have you ever felt it?"

"At Empton, aunt!" answered Agnes eagerly; and even though the carriage door was open, and the step let down, she added, "The only home I ever loved I owed to you."

Hastily as this word was said, it sunk with very healing effect into the heart of the self-reproaching old lady .... it was answered by a cordial "God bless you!" and hand in hand the very happy pair walked up the staircase together. The accomplished William had preceded them, and thrown open the door of aunt Betsy's handsome drawing-room; and no apartment could offer an aspect of more comfort. The evening had all the chilliness of September when its sun is gone; and the small bright fire, with a sofa placed cosily near it, looked cheerily. Wax-lights on the chimney and tea-table, gave

light sufficient to shew a large, exceedingly well-fitted up room; and a pretty young woman, neatly dressed, came forward to offer her services in the removal of cloaks and shawls.

Agnes looked round the room, and then turned to her aunt, as if tacitly demanding an explanation of what she saw. Miss Compton smiled, and answered the appeal by saying, "Did you expect, dearest, that I should be able to bring my farm-house and my bees with me?"

"No, aunt Compton," replied Agnes, very gravely, "I did not expect that; .... but...."

"Aunt Betsy—you must always call me aunt Betsy, Agnes. That was the appellation that your dear voice uttered so joyously when I entered the dark den in which I found you, and I shall never like any other as well.... But don't be frightened because I have somewhat changed my mode of living, my dear child. I will not invite you to ramble through the streets of London, in order to visit me when I am in prison for debt. I know what my means are, Agnes—few ladies better—and I will never exceed them."

This was said very gravely, and the assurance was by no means unimportant to the tranquillity of the young heiress. The scenes she had recently passed through would have reconciled her to a farm-house, a cottage, a hut; so that the air of heaven blew untainted round it, and no livery-stable keepers, or bailiff's followers, could find entrance there. But Miss Compton's words and manner set her heart at rest on that score, though they could not remove her astonishment, the involuntary expression of which, on her beautiful face, was by no means disagreeable to the novel-read aunt Betsy. It was just as it should be .... beauty, goodness, misery, ill-usage, and all; and she felt most happily convinced that, if there were but a lover in the case, and such a one as, despite all obstacles, she could approve, she should to her dying day have the comfort of thinking that the moment which she had chosen for ceasing to accumulate, and beginning to spend, was the very best possible.

And this lover in the clouds .... Would Agnes open her heart to her on such a subject? .... Had she any right to hope it? .... Not

yet, certainly not yet, thought Miss Compton as, the services of William over, and the tea-things removed, they drew nearer the fire ; and she fixed her eyes anew on the beautiful face she so greatly loved to contemplate, partly because it was so beautiful, and partly because she could not trace in it the slightest resemblance to any member of the Wisett race.

But soft and peaceful as was now the expression of that face, there might occasionally be seen by an accurate observer that indescribable look of thoughtfulness in the eyes which never arises till the mind has been awakened, upon some subject or other, to emotions of deep interest. Miss Compton was a very accurate observer, and saw, as plainly as Lavater himself could have done, that Agnes had learned to feel.

The romantic old lady would have given her right hand to possess her confidence, but she was determined not to ask for it.

" Do you think we shall be happy together, Agnes ?" said she, in a voice which, when its cheerful tone was not exaggerated into the ironical levity in which she sometimes indulged,

was singularly pleasing. "Do you think that you shall like to be my darling?"

"Yes, I do," replied Agnes, with the sudden bluntness of sincerity; "but I think I shall plague you sometimes, aunt Betsy."

"You have made up your mind to that already, have you?" returned Miss Compton, delighted at the playful tone in which she spoke; "then, in that case, I must make up my mind too, and contrive to make a pleasure of what you call a plague. How do you mean to begin, Agnes? .... What will you do first? .... Will you cry for the moon?"

"Will you try to get it for me if I do, aunt Betsy?" said Agnes, laughing.

"Yes, I will .... that is, if you will let me know what sort of moon it is, and to what part of the heavens I must turn to find it. Jupiter, you know, has ...."

"Oh! my moon is the highest and brightest of them all!...." said Agnes, with a sigh; and, after remaining silent for a moment, she added, .... "Aunt Betsy, may I tell you everything that has happened to me?"

"If you love me well enough to do this, my

child," said the delighted old lady, while, nevertheless, a tear glistened in her clear black eye, — "if you love me well enough, I shall feel that I have not given up my bees and my flowers for nothing."

Agnes drew nearer, and, after a moment's hesitation, began.

"I believe that all young ladies' histories have something about a gentleman in them, and so has mine . . . ."

"A *young* gentleman, I hope, Agnes?" interrupted the aunt, with a smile.

Agnes coloured a little, but replied, "He is not so very young, aunt Betsy, as to make his youth his most remarkable quality."

"Very well, that is all quite right; he ought to be older than you, my dear. . . . Go on."

"When I was at Clifton, aunt Betsy, I was often in company with Colonel Hubert . . . ."

"A colonel? . . . . That sounds very respectable; he was the father, I suppose, of THE gentleman?"

"No, indeed," replied Agnes, with some vexation; "he is himself the only gentleman that I have anything to say about, . . . . and his

sister says that he will be a general next month."

"Indeed! .... A general? .... General Hubert! .... a very eligible acquaintance, I have no doubt.... I should hardly have hoped you could have had the good luck to meet with such among the friends of your aunt Barnaby."

"An eligible acquaintance! .... Oh! aunt, you don't understand me at all! .... But I will tell you everything. Colonel Hubert is .... I can't describe him.... I hope you will see him, aunt Betsy, and then you will not wonder, perhaps, that I should have thought him, from the very first moment I saw him, the only person in the world...."

Agnes stopped short; but Miss Compton seemed to think she had finished her phrase very properly.

"And what did he think of you, my dear? .... this young colonel?"

"Colonel Hubert never said anything about it at Clifton," replied Agnes, blushing; "but yet I thought — I hoped he liked me, though I knew it did not signify whether he did or not, for he is one of a very distinguished

family, .... who could never, I imagined, think seriously of any one living with .... with my aunt Barnaby. But at Cheltenham I became acquainted with his aunt, Lady Elizabeth Norris, and his sister, Lady Stephenson, and they were very, *very* kind to me; and when I came to London with my aunt Barnaby in this wild manner, they were very anxious about me, and made me promise to write to them.... But before I thought they could know anything about her being taken to prison .... the very day indeed that she went there, in the evening, while I was sitting in that dismal room, just as you found me to-night .... Colonel Hubert .... Oh! aunt Betsy .... the sight of you did not surprise me more .... Colonel Hubert walked in."

"That was hardly right, though, Agnes, if he knew you were alone."

"He brought a letter from his aunt and sister, most kindly asking me to take shelter with them immediately; .... and I am quite sure that when he came he had no intention of speaking of anything but that..... But I believe I looked very miserable, and his generous

heart could not bear it, so he told me that he loved me, and asked me to be his wife."

"It *was* generous of him at such a dreadful moment," said the spinster, her eyes again twinkling through tears.... "And how did you answer him, my love?"

"I told him," replied Agnes, trembling and turning pale as she spoke, "I told him that I could never be his wife!"

"Why, my dear, I thought you said,".... cried the old lady, looking much disappointed, ...."I thought you said you admired him of all things, and I am sure he seems to have deserved it; but I suppose you thought he was too old for you?"

"No! no! no!" replied Agnes vehemently ...."He is young enough for me to love him, oh! so dearly!.... It was because I could not bear that he should marry so beneath himself ....it was because I thought his aunt and sister would resent it ...."

"Humph!....That was very generous on your part too; but I suppose he knows best.... And what did he say then, Agnes?"

"Oh! aunt Betsy!.... he said exactly as

you did.... he said that he was too old for me to love him; ...." and, remembering the agony of that moment, she hid her face in her hands and wept.

Miss Compton looked at her with pitying eyes; and, after a moment, said, "And so you parted, Agnes?"

"Yes!" she replied, removing her hands. "It was almost so, and yet not quite.... I could not tell him, you know, how dearly, how very dearly I loved him!.... that was impossible!.... but I said something about his sister and his aunt; and then .... oh! I shall never forget him!.... something like hope.... pray, do not think me vain, aunt Betsy,—but it *was* hope that shot into his eye again, and changed the whole expression of his face;.... yet he said no more about his love, and only asked me to promise never to leave the shelter of that roof till I heard from his aunt again .... And I did promise him.... But could I keep it, aunt?.... It would have been obeying him in words, and not in spirit.... And now I'm coming to my reason for telling you all this

so very soon.... What shall I say to them now? How shall I write to them?"

It seemed that Miss Compton did not find this a very easy question to answer, for she took many minutes to consider of it. At length she said, .... "As to setting right the love part of the affair, you need not alarm yourself, my dear.... there will be no great difficulty in that.... If you know your own mind, and really are in love with a general, instead of an ensign, I don't see why you should be contradicted, though it is a little out of the common way.... He is a gentleman, and that is the only point upon which I could have been very strict with you.... But there is another thing, Agnes, in which you must please to let me have my own way ....Will you promise me?"

"How can there be any way but yours in what concerns me, dear aunt Betsy?"

"Bless you, my dear!.... I will not be a tyrant....at least not a very cruel tyrant; but my happiness will be injured for the rest of my life, Agnes, if the next time you see

this gentleman and his family, it is not in such a manner as to make them perceive, without the necessity of their listening to an old woman's long story about it, that you are not an unworthy match for him in any way.... Let this be managed, and everything will end well.... There will be no risk of your witnessing, either in the words or looks of these noble ladies whom you call your friends, any struggle between their partiality for you and their higher hopes for him. He will ever remember with pleasure that he waited not for this to offer you his hand and heart; and trust me you will never remember with sorrow that you did wait for it before you accepted him. Do you agree with me?"

"Indeed I do!" fervently replied Agnes. "But could they see me at this moment, would not your wish be answered? Could they doubt for a moment, while seeing you, and seeing the style of all about you, that I am something more than the poor hopeless dependant of Mrs. Barnaby?"

"That is not it.... That would not do at all, child," replied the old lady, sharply.

"It shall not be the poor dependant of anybody that this noble-hearted Colonel Hubert shall come to woo. Love him as much as you will, the world may say, and his family may think too, that his rank and station led you to accept him. I will save you both from this danger. Colonel Hubert shall not try his chance with you again till you are the independent possessor of fifteen hundred pounds a-year. When I die, Agnes, if you behave well in the interim, I will bequeath my bees to you, and all the furniture of my two pretty rooms at Compton Basett, as well as all the reserved rents in the shape of allowances, coals, wood, attendance, and the like, which will be mine while I live. This, my dear, shall come to you in the way of legacy, in case I continue to be pleased with your behaviour; but there is no way for me to atone for the injury I have done to the representative of my family by suffering her to remain six months with Mrs. Barnaby, but making her at once the independent possessor of the Compton property."

"My dear, dear aunt!" said Agnes, most unfeignedly distressed, "there can be no

occasion at this moment to talk of your doing what, in my poor judgment, would be so very wrong.... Should I be so happy as to make Colonel Hubert known to you, I would trust to him to discuss such subjects.... Oh! what delight, aunt Betsy, for you to have such a man for your friend!.... and all owing to me!"

There was something so ingenuous, so young, so unquestionably sincere in this burst of feeling, that the old lady was greatly touched by it. "You are a sweet creature, Agnes," she replied, "and quite right in telling me not to discuss any matters of business with you.... I shall touch on no such subjects again, for I see they are totally beyond your comprehension. Nevertheless, I must have my way about not introducing myself to Colonel Hubert's family, or himself either, in lodgings. Write to your kind friends, my dear; tell them that your old aunt Compton has left her retirement to take care of you, and tell them also that she feels as she ought to do.... But, no; you write your own feelings, and I will write mine.... But

this must be to-morrow, Agnes; .... it is past twelve o'clock, love. See! that gay thing on the chimney-piece attests it.... I must shew you to your room, my guest; hereafter I shall be yours, perhaps."

Peggy being summoned, the two ladies were lighted to the rooms above.... These were in a style of great comfort, and even elegance; but one being somewhat larger than the other, and furnished with a dressing-room, it was in this that Agnes found her trunk and book-box; and it was here that, after seeing that her fire burned brightly, and that Peggy was standing ready to assist in undressing her, the happy Miss Compton embraced, blessed, and left her to repose.

It was a long time, however, before Agnes would believe that anything like sleep could visit her eyes that night. What a change, what an almost incredible transition, had she passed through since her last sleep! It was more like the operation of a magician's wand than the consequence of human events. From being a reprobated outcast, banished from the

roof that sheltered her, she had become the sole object of love and care to one who seemed to have it in her power to make life a paradise to her. How many blissful visions floated through her brain before all blended together in one general consciousness of happy security, that at last lulled her to delicious sleep! She was hardly less sensible than her somewhat proud aunt of the pleasure which a reunion with her Cheltenham friends, under circumstances, so changed, would bring; and her dreams were of receiving Lady Elizabeth Norris and her niece in a beautiful palace on the shores of a lovely lake, while Colonel Hubert stood smiling by to watch the meeting.

## CHAPTER VIII.

AGNES APPEARS LIKELY TO PROFIT BY THE CHANGE OF AUNTS.

The first waking under the consciousness of new, and not yet familiar happiness, is perhaps one of the most delightful sensations of which we are susceptible. Agnes had closed her eyes late, and it was late when she opened them, for Peggy had already drawn her window curtains ; and the gay hangings and large looking-glasses of the apartment met her eyes at the first glance with such brilliant effect, that she fancied for an instant she must still be dreaming. But by degrees all the delightful truth returned upon her mind. Where was the blank, cold isolation of the heart, with which her days were used to rise

and set? Where were the terrors amidst which she lived, lest her protectress should expose herself by some monstrous, new absurdity? Where was the hopeless future, before which she had so often wept and trembled? Was it possible that she was the same Agnes Willoughby who had awoke with such an aching heart, but four-and twenty hours ago? . . . . . All these questions were asked, and gaily answered, before she had resolution to spring from her bed, and change her delightful speculations for a more delightful reality.

Notwithstanding the various fatigues of the preceding day, Miss Compton was not only in the drawing-room, but her letter to Lady Elizabeth Norris was already written on the third side of a sheet of letter paper, thus giving Agnes an opportunity of explaining everything before her own lines should meet her ladyship's eye.

The meal which has been slandered as "lazy, lounging, and most unsocial," was far otherwise on the present occasion. The aunt and niece sat down together, each regaling the eyes of the other with a countenance speaking the most

heart-felt happiness; and while the old lady indulged herself with sketching plans for the future, the young one listened as if her voice were that of fate, declaring that she should never taste of sorrow more.

"The carriage will be here at twelve, Agnes," said Miss Compton, to "take us into what our books tell us is called THE CITY, as if it were the city of cities, and about which I suppose you and I are equally ignorant, seeing that you never did take that pleasant little walk the dowager Mrs. Barnaby so considerately sketched out for you. So now we shall look at it together. But don't fancy, my dear, that any such idle project as looking at its wonders is what takes me there now. . . . I have got a broker, Agnes, as well as the widow, and it is quite as necessary to my proceedings as to hers that I should see him. But we must not go till our partnership letter is ready for the post. Here is my share of it Agnes . . . . . read it to me, and if it meets your approbation, sit down and let your own precede it."

The lines written by Miss Compton were as follow:—

" Madam,

" Permit a stranger, closely connected by the ties of blood to Agnes Willoughby, to return her grateful thanks for kindness extended to her at a moment when she greatly needed it. That she should so have needed it, will ever be a cause of self-reproach to me; nor will it avail me much either in my own opinion, or in that of others, that the same qualities in our common kinswoman, Mrs. Barnaby, which produced the distress of Agnes, produced in me the aversion which kept me too distant to perceive their effects on her respectability and happiness.

" I am, Madam,

" Your grateful and obedient servant,

" Elizabeth Compton."

Agnes wrote:—

" My kind and generous Friends!

" Lady Elizabeth! . . . . Lady Stephenson! I write to you, as I never dared hope to do, from under the eye and the protection of my dear aunt Compton. It is to her I owe all the education I ever received, and, I might add, all the

happiness too, . . . . for I have never known any happy home but that which her liberal kindness procured for me during five years spent in the family of my beloved instructress Mrs. Wilmot. For the seven months that have elapsed since I quitted Mrs. Wilmot, my situation, as you, my kind friends, know but too well, has been one of very doubtful respectability, but very certain misery. My aunt Compton blames herself for this, but you, if I should ever be so happy as to make you know my aunt Compton, will blame me. Her former kindness ought to have given me courage to address her before, even though circumstances had placed me so entirely in the hands of Mrs. Barnaby as to make the separation between us fearfully wide. But, thank God! all this unhappiness is now over. I *did* apply to her at last, and the result has been the converting me from a very hopeless, friendless, and miserable girl (as I was when you first saw me) into one of the very happiest persons in the whole world. I have passed through some scenes, from the remembrance of which I shall always shrink with pain; but there have been others . . . . there have been points in my little

history, which have left an impression a thousand times deeper, and dearer too, than could ever have been produced on any heart unsoftened by calamity. And must it not ever be accounted among my best sources of happiness, that the regard which can never cease to be the most precious, as well as the proudest boast of my life, was expressed under circumstances which to most persons would have appeared so strongly against me?

"My generous friends! .... May I hope that the affection shewn to me in sorrow will not be withdrawn now that sorrow is past? .... May I hope that we shall meet again, and that I may have the great happiness of making my dear aunt known to you? She is all kindness, and would take me to Cheltenham, that I might thank you in person for the aid so generously offered in my hour of need, but I fear poor Mrs. Barnaby's adventures will for some time be too freshly remembered there for me to wish to revisit it.". ...

When Agnes had written thus far, she stopped. "Where shall I tell them, aunt Betsy, that we are going to remain?" she said .... "If .... if Colonel Hubert" .... and she stopped again.

"If Colonel Hubert .... and what then, Agnes?"

"Why, if Colonel Hubert *were* to pay us a visit, aunt Betsy, I cannot help thinking that he would understand me better now, than when I was so dreadfully overpowered by the feeling of my desolate condition..... Don't you think so?"

"I think it very probable he might, my dear; .... and as to your sensible question, Agnes, of where we are going to be, I think you must decide it yourself. We have both declared against Cheltenham, and for reasons good .... Where then should you best like to go?"

"To Clifton, aunt Betsy! .... It was there I saw him first, and there, too, I was most kindly treated by friends who, I believe, pitied me because .... because I did not seem happy, I suppose .... Oh! I would rather go to Clifton than any place in the world .... excepting Empton."

"And to Empton we cannot go just at present, Agnes .... it would be too much like running out of the world again, which I have no wish at all to do. To Clifton, therefore, we will

go, dear child, and so you may tell your good friends."

Agnes gave no other answer than walking round the table and imprinting a kiss upon the forehead of her happy aunt . . . . Then resuming her writing, she thus concluded her letter :—

" My aunt Compton, as soon as she has concluded some business which she has to settle in London, will go to Clifton, where, I believe, we shall stay for some months; and should any of your family happen again to be there, I may perhaps be happy enough to see them. With gratitude to all, I remain ever your attached and devoted

" AGNES WILLOUGHBY."

Poor Agnes ! . . . . She was terribly dissatisfied with her letter when she had written it. Not all her generalizations could suffice to tell him, THE him, the only mortal him she remembered in the world,—not all her innocent little devices to make it understood that *he* was included in all her gratitude and love, as well as in her invitation to Clifton,—made it at all clear that she

wanted Colonel Hubert to come and offer to her again.

Yet what could she say more? .... She sat with her eye fixed on the paper, and a face full of meaning, though what that meaning was, it might not be very easy to decide.

"What is my girl thinking of?" said Miss Compton.

"I am thinking," replied Agnes, and she shook her head, "I am thinking that Colonel Hubert will never understand from this letter, aunt Betsy, how very much I want to see him again."

"That is very true, my dear."

"Is there anything else I could say to make him know how greatly he mistook me when he fancied I said NO from my want of love?"

"Oh yes! my dear, certainly."

"Tell me then, my dear, dear, aunt! .... I feel as if I had no power to find a word .... Tell me what I shall say to him."

"You may say many things ... for instance, .... you may say, Tell my beloved Colonel Hubert ...."

"Oh! aunt Betsy! .... aunt Betsy! you

are laughing at me," cried Agnes, looking at her very gravely, and with an air of melancholy reproach.

"So I am, my dear: an old spinster of three score is but a poor confidant in matters of this sort .... But if you seriously ask for my advice, I will give it, such as it is. Let our letter go just as it is, without any addition or alteration whatever. If Colonel Hubert sees this letter, as you seem to expect, and if he loves you as you deserve to be loved, he will find food enough for hope therein to carry him further than from one end of Gloucestershire to the other .... If he does *not* see it, put what you will in it, he would learn nothing thereby .... But if, seeing it, he determines to sit quietly down under your refusal .... then let him; I, for one, should feel no wish to become better acquainted with the gentleman."

Agnes said no more, but folded the letter, and directed it to Lady Elizabeth Norris, Cheltenham.

"Now, aunt, I have folded up Colonel Hubert, and put him out of sight till he shall choose to bring himself forward again .... I will tease you no more about him .... Shall I put my

bonnet on? . . . . The carriage has been waiting for some time."

"My darling Agnes!". . . . said the old lady, looking fondly at her, "how little I deserve to find you so exactly what I wished you should be! . . . . You are right; we will talk no more of this Colonel Hubert till he has himself declared what part he means to play in the drama before us. We shall be at no loss for subjects. . . . Remember how much we have to settle between us! . . . . our establishment, our equipage, our wardrobes, all to be decided upon, modelled, and provided. Get ready, dearest; the sooner we get through our business, the earlier we shall be at Clifton; . . . . and who knows which part of our *dramatis personæ* may arrive there first?"

A happy smile dimpled the cheek of Agnes as she ran out of the room to equip herself, and in a few minutes the two ladies were *en route* towards the city.

"What makes you wear such very deep mourning, my dear?" said Miss Compton, fixing her eyes on the perennial black crape bonnet of her companion. "Is it all for the

worthy apothecary of Silverton? . . . . But that can't be either, for now I think of it, his charming widow had half the colours of the rainbow about her. . . . What does it mean, Agnes?"

Agnes looked out of the window to conceal a smile, but recovering her composure answered, . . . . "I have never been out of mourning, aunt, since Mr. Barnaby died. . . . There was a great deal of black not worn out, . . . . and as it made no difference to me . . . ."

"Oh! monstrous!" . . . . interrupted Miss Compton. "I see it all: . . . . while she wantons about like a painted butterfly, she has thrown her chrysalis-case upon you, my pretty Agnes, in the hope of making you look like a grub beside her. . . . Is it not so?"

"Oh no! . . . . my aunt Barnaby loves dress certainly, . . . . and greatly dislikes black, and so . . . ."

"And so you are to wear it for her? . . . . Well, Agnes, you shan't abuse her, if you think it a sin. . . . God forbid! . . . . But do not refuse to let me into a few of her ways. . . . Did she ever ask you to put on her widow's

cap, my dear? It might have sayed the expense of night-caps at least."

* * * * *

It was almost a cruelty in Agnes to conceal the many characteristic traits of selfish littleness which she had witnessed in her widowed aunt, from the caustic contemplation of her spinster one, for she would have enjoyed it. But it was so much in her nature to do so, that dearly as she would have loved to amuse aunt Betsy, and give scope to her biting humour on any other theme, she gave her no encouragement on this; so, by degrees, all allusion to Mrs. Barnaby dropped out of their discourse; and if, from time to time, some little sample of her peculiarities peeped forth involuntarily in speaking of the past, the well-schooled old lady learned to enjoy them in silence, and certainly did not love her niece the less for the restraint thus put upon her.

* * * * *

Considering how complete a novice our spinster practically was as to everything concerning the vast Babylon called London, she contrived to go where she wished and where she

willed with wonderfully few blunders. It was all managed between William and herself, and Agnes marvelled at the ease with which much seemingly important business was transacted.

The carriage was stopped before a very dusky-looking mansion at no great distance from the Exchange, within the dark passage of which William disappeared for some moments, and then returning, opened the carriage door, and, without uttering a word, gave his arm to assist Miss Compton to descend.

"I will not keep you waiting long, my dear," she said, and, without further explanation, followed her confidential attendant into the house. In about half an hour she returned, accompanied by a bald-headed, yellow-faced personage, who, somewhat to the surprise of Agnes, mounted the carriage after her, and placed himself as *bodkin* between them. "To the Bank," was the word of command then given, and in a moment they again stopped, and Agnes was once more left alone.

The interval during which she was thus left was this time considerably longer than the last, and she had long been tired of watching the

goers and comers, all bearing, however varied their physiognomy, the same general stamp of busy, anxious interest upon their brows, before the active old lady and her bald-headed acquaintance re-appeared.

The old gentleman handed her into the carriage, and then took his leave amidst a multitude of obsequious bows, and assurances that her commands should always be obeyed at the shortest notice, *et cetera*, *et cetera*, *et cetera*.

"Agnes"! . . . . said the old lady, as soon as she had exchanged a few words with William as to where she next wished to go, "Agnes! I look to you to supply the place of my bees and my flowers, and I do not much fear that I shall lament the exchange; but you must not continue to be dight in this grim fashion; it might be soothing to the feelings of Mr. Barnaby's fond widow, but to me it is very sad and disagreeable. . . . And so, my dear, here is wherewithal to change it."

During the whole of this speech Miss Compton had been employed in extracting a pocket-book of very masculine dimensions from her pocket; and having at length succeeded, she opened it,

drew forth two bank-notes of twenty-five pounds each, and laid them in the lap of her niece.

Agnes took them up, and looked at them with unfeigned astonishment. "My dear aunt," she said, "I am afraid you will find me a much younger and more ignorant sort of girl than you expected. . . . I shall no more know what to do with all this money than a child of five years old. You forget, aunt Betsy, that I never have had any money of my own since I was born, and I really do not understand anything about it."

"This is a trouble of a new and peculiar kind, my dear, and I really don't remember, in all my reading, to have found a precedent for it. . . . What shall we do, Agnes? . . . . Must you always wear this rusty-looking black gown, because you don't know how to buy another?"

"Why, no, aunt . . . . I don't think that will be necessary either; but don't you think it would be better for you to buy what you like for me? . . . . It won't be the first time, aunt Betsy. I have not forgotten when my pretty trunk was opened by Mrs. Wilmot, . . . . or how very nicely everything was provided for the poor ragged little girl who never before, as long as she

could remember, had possessed anything beside thread-bare relics, cobbled up to suit her dimensions. . . . It was you who thought of everything for me then . . . . and I 'm quite sure you love me a great deal better now ;" and Agnes placed the notes in Miss Compton's hands as she spoke.

" I had prepared myself for a variety of new occupations," replied the spinster, " but choosing the wardrobe of an elegant young lady was certainly not one of them. . . . However, my dear, I have no objection to shew you that my studies have prepared me for this too . . . . Nothing like novel-reading, depend upon it, for teaching a solitary recluse the ways of the world. You shall see how ably I will expend this money, Agnes ; but do not turn your head away, and be thinking of something else all the time, because it is absolutely necessary, I do assure you, that a young lady in possession of fifteen hundred a year should know how to buy herself a new bonnet and gown."

The value of Miss Compton's literary researches was by no means lowered in the estimation of Agnes by the results of the three hours which followed ; for though there were moments in which her thoughts would spring away, in spite

of all she could do to prevent it, from discussions on silks and satins to a meditation on her next interview with Colonel Hubert, she was nevertheless sufficiently present to what was passing before her eyes to be aware that an old lady, who has herself lived in a "grogram gown" for half a century, may be capable of making a mighty pretty collection of finery for her niece, provided that she has paid proper attention to fashionable novels, and knows how to ask counsel, as to what *artistes* to drive to, from so intelligent an aide-de-camp as William.

In short, by the united power of the money and the erudition she had hoarded, Miss Compton contrived, in the course of a fortnight, to make as complete a change in the equipments of Agnes as that performed of yore upon Cinderella by her godmother. Nor was her own wardrobe neglected; she had no intention that the rusticity of her spinster aunt should draw as many eyes on Agnes as the gaudiness of her widowed one, and proved herself as judicious in the selection of sable satins and velvets for herself, as in the choice of all that was most becoming and elegant for the decoration of her lovely niece.

Never, certainly, was an old lady more completely happy than the eccentric, proud, warm-hearted aunt Betsy, as, with a well-filled purse, she drove about London, and found everything she deemed suitable to the proper setting forth of her heiress ready to her hand or her order. She could not, indeed, have a carriage built for her .... she could not afford time for it; .... but William, the indefatigable William, ransacked Long Acre from one end to the other, till he had discovered an equipage as perfect in all its points as any order could have made it; and on this the well-instructed Miss Compton, whose heraldic lore was quite sufficient to enable her with perfect accuracy to blazon her own arms, had her lozenge painted in miniature; which being all that was required to render the neat equipage complete, this portion of their preparation did not cause any delay.

To Miss Peters Agnes wrote of all the unexpected good which had befallen her, with much freer confidence than she could indulge in when addressing the relations of Colonel Hubert. Her friend Mary already knew the name of "Miss Compton, of Compton Basett," and no fear of

appearing boastful rendered it necessary for her to conceal how strangely the aspect of her worldly affairs was changed.

To her, and her good-natured mother, was confided the task of choosing lodgings for them; and so ably was this performed, that exactly in one fortnight and three days from the time Colonel Hubert had left Agnes so miserably alone in Mrs. Barnaby's melancholy lodgings in Half-Moon Street, she was established in airy and handsome apartments in the Mall of Clifton, with every comfort and elegance about her that thoughtful and ingenious affection could suggest to make the contrast more striking.

The happiness of this meeting with the kind friends who had conceived so warm an affection for her, even when presented by Mrs. Barnaby, was in just proportion to the hopeless sadness with which she had bid them farewell; and the reception of her munificent aunt among them, with the cordial good understanding which mutually ensued, did all that fate and fortune could do to atone for the suffering endured since they had parted.

## CHAPTER IX.

BRINGS US BACK, AS IT OUGHT, TO MRS. BARNABY.

It may be thought, perhaps, that the vexed, and, as she thought herself, the persecuted Mrs. Barnaby, had sufficiently tried what a prison was, to prevent her ever desiring to find herself within the walls of such an edifice again; but such an opinion, however likely to be right, was nevertheless wrong; for no sooner had the widow recovered from the fit of rage into which the triumphant exit of Miss Compton had thrown her, and settled herself on her solitary sofa, with no better comforter or companion than a cup of tea modified with sky-blue milk, than the following soliloquy (though she gave it not breath) passed through her brain.

"Soh! .... Here I am then, after six months' trial of the travelling system, and a multitude of experiments in fashionable society, just

seven hundred pounds poorer than when I set out, and without having advanced a single inch towards a second marriage. . . . This will never do ! . . . . My youth, my beauty, and my fortune will all melt away together before the object is obtained, unless I change my plans, and find out some better mode of proceeding."

Here Mrs. Barnaby sipped her vile tea, opened her work-box that she had been constrained to leave so hastily, ascertained that the exquisite collar she was working had received no injury during her absence, and then resumed her meditations.

" Heigh ho ! . . . . It is most horribly dull, sitting in this way all by one's-self. . . . even that good-for-nothing, stupid, ungrateful Agnes was better to look at than nothing ; . . . . and even in that horrid Fleet there was some pleasure in knowing that there was an elegant, interesting man, to be met in a passage now and then . . . . whose eyes spoke plainly enough what he thought of me. . . . Poor fellow ! . . . . His being in misfortune ought not to produce ill-will to him in a generous mind ! . . . . How he looked as he said ' Adieu, then, madam ! . . . . With you vanishes the last ray of light that will ever reach my

heart!' .... And I am sure he said exactly what he felt, and no more. .... Poor O'Donagough! .... My heart aches for him!"

And here she fell into a very piteous and sentimental mood, indeed. Had her soliloquy been spoken out as loud as words could utter it, nobody would have heard a syllable about love, marriage, or any such nonsense; her heart was at this time altogether given up to pity, compassion, and a deep sense of the duties of a Christian; and before she went to bed she had reasoned herself very satisfactorily into the conviction that, as a tender-hearted woman and a believer, it was her bounden duty, now that she had got out of trouble herself, to return to the Fleet for the purpose of once more seeing Mr. O'Donagough, and inquiring whether it was in her power to do anything to serve him before she left London.

Nothing more surely tends to soothe the spirits and calm the agitated nerves than an amiable and pious resolution, taken, as this was done, during the last waning hours of the day, and just before the languid body lays itself down to rest. Mrs. Barnaby slept like a top after coming to the de-

termination that, let the turnkeys think what they would of it, she would call at the Fleet Prison, and ask to see Mr. O'Donagough, the following morning.

The following morning came, and found the benevolent widow stedfast in her purpose; and yet, to her honour be it spoken, it was not without some struggles with a feeling which many might have called shame, but which she conscientiously condemned as pride, that she set forth at length upon her adventurous expedition.

"Nothing, I am sure," .... it was thus she reasoned with herself, .... "nothing in the whole world could induce me to take such a step, but a feeling that it was my duty. Heaven knows I have had many follies in my day—I don't deny it; I am no hardened sinner, and that blessed book that he lent me has not been a pearl thrown to swine. '*The Sinner's Reward!*' .... what a comforting title! .... I don't hope ever to be the saint that the pious author describes, but I'm sure I shall be a better woman all my life for reading it; .... and the visiting this poor O'Donagough is the first act by which I can prove the good it has done me!"

Then came some doubts and difficulties respecting the style of toilet which she ought to adopt on so peculiar an occasion. "It won't do for a person looking like a woman of fashion to drive up to the Fleet Prison, and ask to see such a man as O'Donagough .... He is too young and handsome to make it respectable .... But, after all, what does it signify what people say? ... And as for my bonnet, I'll just put my Brussels lace veil on my black and pink; that will hide my ringlets, and make me look more matronly."

In her deep lace veil then, and with a large silk cloak which concealed the becoming gaiety of her morning dress, Mrs. Barnaby presented herself before the gates she had so lately passed, and in a very demure voice said to the keeper of it, "I wish to be permitted to see Mr. O'Donagough."

The fellow looked at her and smiled. "Well, madam," he replied, "I believe there will be no difficulty about that, Walk on, if you please ... You 'll find them as can send you forward."

A few more barriers passed, and a few more

well-amused turnkeys propitiated, and Mrs. Barnaby stood before a door which she knew as well as any of them opened upon the solitary abode of the broken-hearted but elegant Mr. O'Donagough. The door was thrown open for her to enter; but she paused, desiring her usher to deliver her card first, with an intimation that she wished to speak to the gentleman on business. She was not kept long in suspense, for the voice of the solitary inmate was heard from within, saying in soft and melancholy accents, "It is very heavenly kindness! Beg her to walk in." And in she walked, the room-door being immediately closed behind her.

Mr. O'Donagough was a very handsome man of about thirty years of age, with a physiognomy and cerebral developement which might have puzzled Dr. Combe himself; for impressions left by the past, were so evidently fading away before the active operation of the present, that to say distinctly from the examining eye, or the examining finger, what manner of man he was, would have been exceedingly difficult. But the powers of the historian and biographer are less limited, and their record shall be given.

Mr. Patrick O'Donagough was but a half-breed, and that a mongrel half, of the noble species which his names announce. He was the natural son of an Englishman of wealth and consequence by a poor Irish girl called Nora O'Donagough; and though his father did what was considered by many as very much for him, he never permitted him to assume his name. The young O'Donagough was placed as a clerk to one of the police magistrates of the metropolis, and shewed great ability in the readiness with which he soon executed the business that passed through his hands. He not only learned to know by sight every rogue and roguess that appeared at the office, but shewed a very uncommon degree of sagacity as to their innocence or guilt upon every new occasion that enforced their appearance there. His noble father never entirely lost sight of him; and finding his abilities so remarkable, he was induced again to use his interest in those quarters where influence abides, and to get him promoted to a lucrative situation in a custom-house on the coast, where he made money rapidly, while his handsome person and good address gave him access to the

society of many people greatly his superiors in station, who most of them were frequenting a fashionable watering-place at no great distance from the station where he was employed.

This lasted for a few years, much to the satisfaction of his illustrious parent; and it might have continued till an easy fortune was assured to him, had he not unluckily formed too great an intimacy with one or two vastly gentlemanlike but decidedly sporting characters. From this point his star began to descend, till, step by step, he had lost his money, his appointment, his father's favour, and his own freedom. Having lain in prison for debt during some weeks, he found means again to touch the heart of his father so effectually, as to induce him to pay his debts, and restore him to freedom, upon condition, however, of his immediately setting off for Australia with five hundred pounds in his pocket, and with the understanding that he was never more to return. The promise was given, and the five hundred pounds received; but the young man was not proof against temptation; he met some old acquaintance, lost half his money at *ecartè*, and permitted the vessel in which he was to sail to

depart without him. This was a moment of low spirits and great discouragement; but he felt, nevertheless, that a stedfast heart and bold spirit might bring a man out of as bad a scrape even as that into which he had fallen.

Some people told him to apply again to his father, but he thought he had better not, and he applied to a gentleman with whom he had made acquaintance in prison instead. This person had, like himself, been reduced to great distress by the turf; but having fortunately found means of satisfying the creditor at whose suit he was detained, he was now doing exceedingly well as preacher to an independent congregation of ranting fanatics. He bestowed on his old associate some excellent advice as to his future principles and conduct, giving him to understand that the turf, even to those who were the most fortunate, never answered so well as the line of business he now followed; and assured him, moreover, that if he would forthwith commence an assiduous study of the principles and practice of the profession, he would himself lend him a helping hand to turn it to account. O'Donagough loved change, novelty, and excitement, and again manifested

great talent in the facility with which he mastered the mysteries of this new business. He was soon seen rapidly advancing towards lasting wealth and independence: one of the wealthiest merchants in London had offered him the place of domestic prayer and preacher at his beautiful residence at Castaway-Saved Park, when an almost forgotten creditor, who had lost sight of him for many years, unluckily recognised him as he was delivering a most awakening evening lecture in a large ware-room, converted into a chapel near Moor Fields. Eager to take advantage of this unexpected piece of good fortune, the tailor (for such was his profession) arrested the inspired orator in the first place, and then asked him if he were able to settle his account in the next. Had the manner of transacting the business been reversed, it is probable that the affair would have been settled without any arrest at all; for Sir Miles Morice, of Castaway-Saved Park, was one of the most pious individuals of the age, and would hardly have permitted his chaplain elect (elect in every sense) to have gone to prison for thirty-seven pounds, nine shillings, and eight pence; but being in prison, O'Donagough was shy of

mentioning the circumstance to his distinguished patron, and was employed, at the time Mrs. Barnaby first made acquaintance with him, in composing discourses "on the preternatural powers over the human mind, accorded to the chosen vessels called upon to pour out the doctrine of the new birth to the people." There is little doubt that these really eloquent compositions would have sold rapidly, and perfectly have answered the object of their clever author. But accident prevented the trial from being made, for before the projected volume was more than half finished, success of another kind overtook Mr. O'Donagough.

* * * * *

Mrs. Barnaby, on entering, found the poor prisoner she had so charitably come to visit seated at a writing-desk, with many sheets of closely-written manuscript about it. He rose as she entered, and approached her with a judicious mixture of respectful deference and ardent gratitude.

"May Heaven reward you, madam, for this blessed proof of christian feeling. . . . How can I suitably speak my gratitude?"

"I do assure you, Mr. O'Donagough, that you are quite right in thinking that I come wholly and solely from a christian spirit, and a wish to do my duty," said Mrs. Barnaby.

Mr. O'Donagough looked extremely handsome as he answered with a melancholy smile, "Alas! madam . . . . what other motive could the whole world offer, excepting obedience to the will of Heaven, sufficiently strong to bring such a person as I now look upon voluntarily within these fearful walls?"

"That is very true indeed! . . . . There *is* nothing else that could make one do it. Heaven knows I suffered too much when I was here myself, to feel any inclination for returning; . . . . but I thought, Mr. O'Donagough, that it would be very unfeeling in me, who witnessed your distress, to turn my back upon you when my own troubles are past and over; and so I am come, Mr. O'Donagough, to ask if I can be of any use to you in any way before I set off upon my travels, . . . . for I intend to make a tour to France, and perhaps to Rome."

The widow looked at Mr. O'Donagough's eyes, to see how he took this news; for, somehow or

other, she could not help fancying that the poor young man would feel more forlorn and miserable still, when he heard that not only the walls of the Fleet Prison, but the English Channel, was to divide them: nor did the expression of the eyes she thus examined, lessen this idea. A settled, gentle melancholy seemed to rise from his heart, and peep out upon her through these "*windows of* the soul."

"To France! . . . . To Rome! . . . ." A deep sigh followed, and for a minute or two the young man remained with his eyes mournfully fixed on her face. He then rose up, and stepping across the narrow space occupied by the table that stood between them, he took her hand, and in a deep, sweet voice, that almost seemed breaking into a sob, he said,—"May you be happy whithersoever you go! . . . . My prayers shall follow you . . . . My ardent prayers shall be unceasingly breathed to heaven for your safety; . . . . and my blessing . . . . my fervent, tender blessing, shall hover round you as you go!"

Mrs. Barnaby was exceedingly affected. "Don't speak so! . . . . Pray, don't speak so, Mr. O'-Donagough!" she said, in a voice which gave her

very good reason to believe that tears were coming. "I am sure I would pray for you too, when I am far away, if it would do you any good," and here one of her worked pocket-handkerchiefs was really drawn out and applied to her eyes.

"IF, Mrs. Barnaby!" exclaimed the young man fervently, "IF .... oh! do not doubt it ... do not for a moment doubt that I should feel the influence of it in every nerve. Let me teach you to understand me, Mrs. Barnaby, .... for I have made an examination into the effects of spiritual sympathies the subject of much study .... Lay your hand upon my heart .... nay, let it rest there for a moment, and you will be able to comprehend what I would explain to you. Does not that poor heart beat and throb, Mrs. Barnaby? .... and think you that it would have fluttered thus, had you not said that you would pray for me? .... Then can you doubt that if, indeed, you should still remember the unhappy O'Donagough as you pursue your jocund course o'er hill and vale .... if, indeed, you should breathe a prayer to Heaven for his welfare, can you doubt that it will fall upon him like the soft

fanning of a seraph's wing, and heal the tumult of his soul, e'en in this dungeon ?"

There was so much apparent sincerity, as well as tenderness, in what the young man uttered, that a feeling of conviction at once found its way to the understanding of Mrs. Barnaby; and little doubt, if any, remained on her mind as to the efficacy of her prayers .... "Indeed, Mr. O'Donagough, I will pray for you then, .... and I'm sure I should be a very wicked wretch if I did not .... But is there nothing else I could do to comfort you ?"

Mr. O'Donagough had often found his handsome and expressive countenance of great service to him, and so he did now. No answer he could have given in words to this kind question, could have produced so great effect as the look with which he received it. Mrs. Barnaby was fluttered, agitated, and did not quite know what to do or say next: but Mr. O'Donagough did. He rose from his chair, and raising his arms above his head to their utmost length, he passionately clasped his hands, and stood thus,—his fine eyes communing with the ceiling,—just long enough to give the widow time to be aware

that he certainly was the very handsomest young man in the world; .... and then .... he drew his chair close beside her, took her hand, and fixed those fine eyes very particularly upon hers.

"Comfort me!" .... he murmured in a soft whisper, which, had it not been breathed very close to her ear, would probably have been lost .... "Comfort me! .... you ask if you could comfort me? .... Oh! earth, Oh! heaven, bear witness as I swear, that to trace one single movement of pity on that lovely face, would go farther towards healing every sorrow of my soul, than all the wealth that Plutus could pour on me, though it should come in ingots of gold heavy enough to break the chains that hold me!"

"Oh! Mr. O'Donagough!" ... was all Mrs. Barnaby could utter; but she turned her face away, nor was the fascinating prisoner again indulged with a full view of it, though he endeavoured to make his eyes follow the way hers led, till he dropped down on his knees before her, and by taking possession of both her hands, enabled himself to pursue his interesting speculations upon its expression, in spite of all she could do to prevent

it. This brought the business for which Mrs. Barnaby came, . . . . namely, the inquiry into what she could do to be serviceable to Mr. O'Donagough, before she left London, . . . . to a very speedy termination; for with this fair index of what he MIGHT say before his eyes, the enterprising prisoner ventured to hint, that nothing would so effectually soothe his sorrows as the love of the charming being who had already expressed such melting pity for him. He moreover made it manifest that if she would, with the noble confidence which he was sure made a part of her admirable character, lend him wherewithal to liquidate the paltry debt for which he had been so treacherously arrested, he could find means again to interest his noble father in his behalf, and by giving him such a guarantee for his future steadiness as an honourable attachment was always sure to offer, he should easily induce him to renew his intention of fitting him out handsomely for an expedition to Australia, to which, as he confessed, he was more strongly inclined than even to persevere in listening to the call he had received to the ministry.

Notwithstanding the tender agitation into

which such a conversation must inevitably throw every lady who would listen to it, Mrs. Barnaby did not so completely lose her presence of mind, as not to remember that it would be better to look about her a little before she positively promised to marry and accompany to Australia the captivating young man who knelt at her feet. But this praiseworthy degree of caution did not prevent her from immediately deciding upon granting him the loan he desired; nay, with thoughtful kindness, she herself suggested that it might be more convenient to make the sum lent 40*l.* instead of 37*l.* 9*s.* 8*d.*; and having said this with a look and manner the most touching, she at length induced Mr. O'Donagough to rise; and after a few such expressions of tender gratitude as the occasion called for, they parted, the widow promising to deliver to him with her own fair hands on the morrow the sum necessary for his release; while he, as he fervently kissed her hand, declared, that deeply as he felt this generous kindness, he should wish it had never been extended to him, unless the freedom thus regained were rendered dear to his soul by her sharing it with him.

"Give me time, dear O'Donagough! . . . . Give me time to think of this startling proposal, . . . . and to-morrow we will meet again," were the words in which she replied to him; and then, permitting herself for one moment to return the tender glances he threw after her, she opened the room-door and passed through it, too much engrossed by her own thoughts, hopes, wishes, and speculations, to heed the variety of amusing grimaces by which the various turnkeys hailed her regress through them.

It would be unreasonable for any one to "desire better sympathy" than that which existed between my heroine and Mr. O'Donagough when they thus tore themselves asunder; he remaining in durance vile till such time as fate or love should release him, and she to throw herself into a hackney coach, there to meditate on the pleasures and the pains either promised or threatened by the proposal she had just received.

The sympathy lay in this, . . . . that both parties were determined to inform themselves very particularly of the worldly condition of the other, before they advanced one step farther

towards matrimony, for which state, though the gentleman had spoken with rapture, and the lady had listened with softness, both had too proper a respect to think of entering upon it unadvisedly.

## CHAPTER X.

GIVES SOME ACCOUNT OF COLONEL HUBERT'S RETURN TO CHELTENHAM.

We must now follow Colonel Hubert to Cheltenham, to which place he returned in a state of mind not particularly easy to be described. The barrier he had placed before his heart, the heavy pressure of which he had sometimes felt to be intolerable, was now broken down; and it was a relief to him to remember that Agnes knew of his love. But, excepting this relief, there was little that could be felt as consolatory, and much that was decidedly painful in his state of mind. He knew but too well that not all the partial affection, esteem, and admiration entertained for him by his aunt, would prevent her feeling and expressing the most violent aversion to his marrying the niece of Mrs. Barnaby; he knew, too, what sort of reception the avowal of such an intention was

likely to meet from his amiable but proud brother-in-law, and remembered, with feelings not very closely allied to satisfaction, the charge he had commissioned Lady Stephenson to give him, that he should keep watch over his thoughtless younger brother, in order to guard him, if possible, from bringing upon them the greatest misfortune that could befall a family such as theirs —namely, the introducing an inferior connexion into it.... Neither could he forget the influence he had used, in consequence of this injunction, to crush the ardent, generous, uncalculating attachment of his confiding friend Frederic for her whom, in defiance of the wishes of his whole family, he was now fully determined to make his wife. All this gave materials for very painful meditation; and when, in addition to it, he recalled those fearful words of Agnes, "I will never be your wife!" it required all the power of that master passion which had seized upon his heart to keep him steady to his resolution of communicating his wishes and intentions to Lady Elizabeth, and to sustain his hopes of engaging her actively to assist him in obtaining

what he felt very sure she would earnestly desire that he should never possess.

With all these heavy thoughts working within him, he entered the drawing-room of his aunt, and rejoiced to find her *tête-à-tête* with his sister, Sir Edward being absent at a dinner-party of gentlemen. They both welcomed him with eager inquiries concerning their young favourite, the tone of which at once determined him to enter immediately upon the tremendous subject of his hopes and wishes; and the affectionate interest expressed for her, warmed him into a degree of confidence which he was far from feeling when he entered the room.

"Pretty creature!" exclaimed Lady Elizabeth; "and that wretched woman has actually left her alone in London lodgings?.... Why did you not make her return with you, Montague?.... It was surely no time to stand upon etiquette."

"I dared not even ask it," replied Colonel Hubert, his voice faltering, and his manner such as to make the two ladies exchange a hasty glance with each other.

"You dared not ask Agnes Willoughby, poor little thing, to come down with you to my house, Colonel Hubert?" said the old lady. "You surely forget that you went up to London with an invitation for her in your pocket?"

"My dear aunt," replied Colonel Hubert, hesitating in his speech, as neither of his auditors had ever before heard him hesitate, "I have much to tell you respecting both Agnes Willoughby .... and myself...."

"Then tell it, in Heaven's name!" said Lady Elizabeth sharply. "Let it be what it may, I would rather hear it than be kept hanging thus by the ears between the possible and impossible."

Colonel Hubert moved his chair; and seating himself beside Lady Stephenson, took her hand, as if to shew that she too was to listen to what he was about to say, though it was their aunt to whom he addressed himself. "From suspense, at least, I can relieve you, Lady Elizabeth, and you too, my dear Emily, who look at me so anxiously without saying a word.... at least I can relieve you from suspense .... I love Miss Willoughby; and I hope, with as

little delay as possible, to make her my wife."

Lady Stephenson pressed his hand, and said nothing; but a deep sigh escaped her. Lady Elizabeth, who was not accustomed to manifest her feelings so gently, rose from her seat on the sofa, and placing herself immediately before him, said, with great vehemence, "Montague Hubert, son of my dead sister, you are come to years of discretion, and a trifle beyond.... Your magnificent estate of thirteen hundred a year, and.... I beg your pardon.... some odd pounds, shillings, and pence over, is all your own, and you may marry Mrs. Barnaby herself, if you please, and settle it upon her. No one living that I know of has any power to prevent it.... But, sir, if you expect that Lady Elizabeth Norris will ever receive as her niece a girl artful enough to conceal from me and from your sister the fact that she was engaged to you, and that, too, while receiving from both of us the most flattering attention.... nay, such affection as might have opened any heart not made of brass and steel.... if you expect this, you will find yourself altogether mistaken."

This harangue, which her ladyship intended to be overpoweringly severe, was, in fact, very nearly the most agreeable one that Colonel Hubert could have listened to, for it touched only on a subject of offence that he was perfectly able to remove. All embarrassment immediately disappeared from his manner; and springing up to place himself between his aunt and the door, to which she was approaching with stately steps, he said, in a voice almost of exultation, "My dearest aunt! .... How like your noble self it is to have made this objection before every other! .... And this objection, which would indeed have been fatal to every hope of happiness, I can remove by a single word .... Agnes was as ignorant of my love for her as you and Emily could be till last night .... I have loved her .... longer, it may be, than I have known it myself .... perhaps I might date it from the first hour I saw her, but she knew nothing of it .... Last night, for the first time, I confessed to her my love .... And what think you, Lady Elizabeth, was her answer?"

"Nay, Mr. Benedict, I know not. .... 'I

thank you, sir,' and a low courtesy, I suppose."

"I was less happy, Lady Elizabeth," he replied, half smiling; adding a moment after, however, with a countenance from which all trace of gaiety had passed away, "The answer of Miss Willoughby to my offer of marriage was .... Colonel Hubert, I can never be your wife."

"Indeed! .... Then how comes it, Montague, that you still talk of making her so?"

"Because, before I left her, I thought I saw some ground for hope that her refusal was not caused by any personal dislike to me."

"Really!" .... interrupted Lady Elizabeth.

"Nay, my dear aunt!" resumed Hubert, "you may in your kind and long-enduring partiality fancy this impossible; but, unhappily for my peace at that moment, I remembered that I was more than five-and-thirty, and she not quite eighteen."

"But she told you I suppose that you were still a very handsome fellow .... Only she had some other objection,—and pray, what was it, sir?"

"She feared the connexion would be displeasing to you and Lady Stephenson."

"And you assured her most earnestly, perhaps that she was mistaken?"

"No, Lady Elizabeth, I did not. There are circumstances in her position that MUST make my marrying her appear objectionable to my family; and though my little independence is, as your ladyship observes, my own, I would not wish to share it with any woman who would be indifferent to their reception of her. All my hope, therefore, rests in the confidence I feel that, when the first unpleasing surprise of this avowal shall have passed away, you .... both of you .... for there is no one else whose approbation I should wait for .... you will suffer your hearts and heads to strike a fair and reasonable balance between all that my sweet Agnes has in her favour and all she has against her. Do this, Lady Elizabeth, but do it as kindly as you can .... Emily will help you .... to-morrow morning you shall tell me your decision .... I can resolve on nothing till I hear it."

Colonel Hubert, as soon as he had said this

left the room, nor did they see him again that night.

The morning came, and he met Lady Stephenson at the breakfast table, but Lady Elizabeth did not appear, sending down word, as was not unusual with her, that she should take her chocolate in her own room. Sir Edward was not in the room when he entered, and he seized the opportunity to utter a hasty and abrupt inquiry as to the answer he might expect from herself and their aunt.

"From me, Montague," she replied, "you cannot fear to hear anything very harshly disagreeable. In truth, I have been so long accustomed to believe that whatever my brother did, or wished to do, was wisest—best, that it would be very difficult for me to think otherwise now; besides, I cannot deny, though perhaps it hardly ought to be taken into the account, that I too am very much in love with Agnes Willoughby, and that . . . . though I would give my little finger she had no aunt Barnaby belonging to her . . . . I never saw any woman in any rank whom I could so cordially love and welcome as a sister."

In reply to this, Colonel Hubert clasped the lovely speaker to his heart; and before he had released her from his embrace, or repeated his inquiry concerning Lady Elizabeth, Sir Edward Stephenson entered, and the conversation became general.

For many hours of that irksome morning Colonel Hubert was kept in the most tantalizing state of suspense by the prolonged absence of the old lady from the drawing-room. But at length, after Sir Edward and his lady had set off for their second morning ramble without him, he was cheered by the appearance of the ancient maiden, who was his aunt's tirewoman, bringing in her lap-dog, and the velvet cushion that was its appendage; which having placed reverently before the fire, she moved the favourite *fauteuil* an inch one way, and the little table that ever stood beside it an inch the other, and was retiring, when Colonel Hubert said, . . . . "Is my aunt coming immediately, Mitchel?"

"My lady will not be long, Colonel . . . . But her ladyship is very poorly this morning," and with a graceful swinging courtesy she withdrew.

The Colonel trembled all over, "very poorly,' as applied to Lady Elizabeth Norris, having from his earliest recollection always been considered as synonymous to "very cross."

"She will refuse to see her!" thought he, pacing the room in violent agitation . . . . "and in that case she will keep her word . . . . She will never be my wife!"

"Bless me! . . . . How you do shake the room, Colonel Hubert," said a very crabbed voice behind him, just after he had passed the door in his perturbed promenade. "If you took such a fancy early in the morning, when the house maid might sweep up the dust you had raised, I should not object to it, for it is very like having one's carpet beat; . . . . but just as I am coming to sit down here, it is very disagreeable indeed."

This grumble lasted just long enough to allow the old lady (who looked as if she had been eating crab apples, and walked as if she had suddenly been seized with the gout in all her joints,) to place herself in her easy chair as she concluded it, during which time the Colonel stood still upon the hearth-rug with his eyes anxiously fixed upon the venerable but

very hostile features that were approaching him. A moment's silence followed, during which the old Lady looked up in his face with the most provoking expression imaginable; for cross as it was, there was a glance of playful malice in it that seemed to say,—

"You look as if you were going to cry, Colonel."

He felt provoked with her, and this gave him courage.—"May I beg of you, Lady Elizabeth, to tell me what I may hope from your kindness on the subject I mentioned to you last night?" said he.

"Pray, sir, do you remember your grandfather?" was her reply.

"The Earl of Archdale? . . . . Yes, madam, perfectly."

You do . . . . Humph! . . . . And your paternal grandfather, with his pedigree from Duke Nigel of Normandy; did you ever hear of him?"

"Yes, Lady Elizabeth," replied the Colonel in a tone of indifference; "I have heard of him; but he died, you know, when I was very young."

There was a minute's silence, which was broken by another question from Lady Elizabeth.

"And pray, sir, will you do me the favour to tell me who was the grandfather of Miss Willoughby?"

"I have little, or indeed no doubt, Lady Elizabeth, that Miss Willoughby is the granddaughter of that Mr. Willoughby, of Greatfield Park, in Warwickshire, who lost the tremendous stake at piquet that you have heard of, and two of whose daughters married the twin sons of Lord Eastcomb .... I think you cannot have forgotten the circumstances."

Lady Elizabeth drew herself forward in her chair, and fixing her eyes stedfastly on the face of her nephew, said, in a voice of great severity, "Do you mean to assert to me, Colonel Montague Hubert, that Agnes Willoughby is niece to Lady Eastcomb and the Honourable Mrs. Nivett?"

"I mean to assert to you, madam, that it is my firm persuasion that such will prove to be the fact. But I have not considered it necessary, Lady Elizabeth Norris, for the son of my father to withhold his affections from the chosen of his heart, till he was assured he should gain all the honour by the selection which a union with Lady Eastcomb's niece could bestow; .... nor should

I have mentioned my belief in this connexion, by way of a set-off to the equally near claim of Mrs. Barnaby, had you not questioned me so particularly."

Had Colonel Hubert studied his answer for a twelvemonth, he could not have composed a more judicious one: there was a spice of hauteur in it by no means uncongenial to the old lady's feelings, and there was, too, enough of defiance to make her take counsel with herself as to whether it would be wise to vex him further. It was, therefore, less with the accent of mockery, and more with that of curiosity, that she recommenced her interrogatory.

"Will you tell me, Montague, from what source you derived this knowledge of Miss Willoughby's family? . . . . Was it from herself?"

"Certainly not. If the facts be as I have stated, and as I hope and believe they will be found, Miss Willoughby will be as much surprised by the discovery as your ladyship."

"From whom, then, did you hear it?"

"From no one, Lady Elizabeth, as a matter of fact connected with Agnes. But something, I know not what, introduced the mention of old

Willoughby's wild stake at piquet at the club the other day . . . . The name struck me, and I led old Major Barnes to talk to me of the family. He told me that a younger son, a gay harum-scarum sort of youth, married some girl, when he was in country quarters, whom his family would not receive; that, ruined and broken-hearted by this desertion, he went abroad almost immediately after his marriage, and has never been heard of since."

"And this is the foundation upon which you build your hope, that Mrs. Barnaby's niece is also the niece of Lady Eastcombe? . . . . Ingenious certainly, Colonel, as a theory, but somewhat slight as an edifice on which to hang any weighty matter . . . . Don't you think so?"

"I hang nothing on it, Lady Elizabeth. If I did not feel that Miss Willoughby was calculated to make me happy without this supposed relationship, I certainly should not think her so with it. However, that your ladyship may not fancy my imagination more fertile than it really is, I must add, that when at Clifton, I did hear from the Misses Peters, whom I have before mentioned to you, that the father of Agnes went

abroad after his marriage, and moreover that no news of him in any way ever reached his wife's family afterwards."

Lady Elizabeth for some time made no reply, but seemed to ponder upon this statement very earnestly. At length she said, in a tone from which irony and harshness, levity and severity, were equally banished,—"Montague! . . . . there are some of the feelings which you have just expressed, in which I cannot sympathise; but a very little reflection will teach you that there is no ground of offence to you in this . . . . for it would be unnatural that I should do so. You tell me that your father's son need not deem the honour of a relationship to Viscountess Eastcombe necessary to his happiness in life. So far I am able to comprehend you, although Lady Eastcombe is an honourable and excellent personage, whose near connexion with a young lady would be no contemptible advantage (at least in my mind) upon her introduction into life. But we will pass this. . . . . When, however, you proceed to tell me that your choice in marriage could in nowise be affected by the rank and station of those with whom it might bring you in

contact, and that, too, when the question is, whether a Mrs. Barnaby, or a Lady Eastcombe, should be in the foreground of the group, you must excuse me if I cannot follow you."

Nothing is so distressing in an argument as to have a burst of grandiloquent sentiment set aside by a few words of common sense. Colonel Hubert walked the length of the drawing-room, and back again, before he answered; he felt that, as his aunt put the case, he was as far from *following* his assertion by his judgment as herself; but ere his walk was finished, the image of the desolate Agnes, as he had seen her the night before, arose before him, and resumed its unconquerable influence on his heart. He took a hint from her ladyship, threw aside all mixture of heat and anger, and replied.—

"Heaven forbid, Lady Elizabeth, that I should attempt to defend any such doctrine: . . . . believe me, it is not mine. But, in one word, I love Miss Willoughby; and if I can arrive at the happiness of believing that I am loved in return, nothing but her own refusal will prevent me from marrying her. This is my statement of facts; I will attempt no other, and

throw myself wholly upon your judgment to smooth, or render more rugged, the path which lies before me."

The old lady looked at him and smiled very kindly. "Montague," said she, "resolve my doubts. Is it the mention of your pleasant suspicions respecting Miss Willoughby's paternal ancestry, . . . . or your present unvarnished frankness, that has won upon me? . . . . Upon my honour, I could not answer this question myself; . . . . but certain it is that I do feel more inclined to remember what a very sweet creature Agnes is at this moment, than I ever thought I should again when our conversation began."

Colonel Hubert kneeled down upon her footstool, and kissing her hand, said, in a voice that spoke his happiness, "It matters not to me what the cause is, my dearest aunt. . . . I thank Heaven for the effect! . . . . and now . . . . do not think that I am taking an unfair advantage of this kindness, if I ask you to remember the position of Miss Willoughby at this moment. With such views for the future as I have explained to you, is it not my duty to remove her from it?"

"What then do you propose to do?" demanded Lady Elizabeth.

"*I* can do nothing,". . . . he replied; . . . . "whatever aid or protection can be extended to her, must come from you . . . . or Lady Stephenson; . . . . and that I should rather it came from you, who have long been to me as a mother, can hardly surprise you. Sir Edward is an excellent young man, . . . . but he has prejudices that I should not like to battle with on this occasion. It is from you, and you only, Lady Elizabeth, that I either hope or wish to find protection for my future wife."

Again Lady Elizabeth pondered. "Did not Agnes tell us," she said at length, "did she not say in her letter to Lady Stephenson, that she had applied to some aged relation in Devonshire, by whom she hoped to be extricated from her present terrible embarrasment?"

"It is very likely," replied Colonel Hubert, "for she spoke to me of such a one, and hoped that Thursday . . . . that is to-morrow, is it not? . . . . would bring an answer to her application."

"Then, Montague, we must wait to hear

what this Thursday brings forth before we interfere to repeat the offer of protection which it is possible she may not want. . . . And Heaven grant it may be so, . . . . for if she is to be your wife, Colonel Hubert, and it is pretty plain she will be, will it not be better that you should follow her with your addresses to the lowliest roof in Devonshire, than that she should take refuge here, where every gossip's finger will be pointed at her?"

It was impossible to deny the truth of this, and Colonel Hubert cared not to avow that all the favour she had bid him hope for was but conditional, and that till the avowal of his love should be sanctioned by his aunt and sister, he was still to hold himself as a rejected man. He dared not tell her this, lest the feelings he had conquered with so much difficulty should return, upon learning that it was not yet too late to encourage them.

As patiently as he could, therefore, he awaited the expected letter from Agnes, and well was he rewarded for doing so. The letter itself, modest and unboastful as it was, gave a sufficiently improved picture of her condition to remove all pre-

sent anxiety on her account; and though he certainly had no idea of the transformation she had undergone, from a heart-broken, penniless dependant, into a petted, cherished heiress, he was soothed into the belief that it would now cost his aunt and sister infinitely less pain than he had anticipated, to extend such a degree of favour to his Agnes as might lead her to confirm the hope on which he lived.

But it was not the letter of Agnes that produced the most favourable impression upon Lady Elizabeth; the postscript of Miss Compton was infinitely more powerful in its effect upon her mind. Of Agnes, personally, she never thought without a degree of partial admiration, that nearly approached to affection; and vague as the hope was respecting the family of her father, it clung very pertinaciously to the old lady's memory, while a certain resemblance which she felt sure that she could trace between the nose of Agnes and that of the honourable Miss Nivett, Lord Eastcombe's eldest daughter, was doing wonders in her mind by way of a balance-weight against the rouge and ringlets of Mrs. Barnaby; yet, nevertheless, the notion that not "horrid Mrs. Bar-

naby" only, but a host of aunts and cousins of the same breed, might come down upon her in the event of this ill-assorted marriage, kept her in a sort of feverish wavering state, something between good and ill humour, that was exceedingly annoying to her nephew.

The keen-sighted old lady at once perceived that the postscript to Agnes's letter was not written by a second Mrs. Barnaby, and from that moment she determined, much more decisively than she chose to express, that she would torment Colonel Hubert with no farther opposition.

After a short consultation between the aunt and niece, that letter was despatched, the receipt of which was mentioned before Miss Compton and Agnes left London for Clifton. Had Colonel Hubert been consulted upon it, he would perhaps have suggested, as an improvement, that the proposed meeting should take place the following week in London ; but, on the whole, the composition was too satisfactory for him to venture upon any alteration of it, and again he called patience to his aid, while many miserably long days were wasted by the very slow and deliberate style in which the man and maid servant who

managed all Lady Elizabeth's worldly concerns, set about preparing themselves and her for this removal. It was with a degree of pleasure which almost atoned for the vexation of this delay that he learned Sir Edward's good-natured compliance with his beautiful bride's capricious-seeming wish of revisiting Clifton. Colonel Hubert pertinaciously refused to let his gay brother-in-law into his confidence, till the time arrived for presenting him to Miss Willoughby, as to his future wife. Did this reserve arise from some unacknowledged doubt whether Agnes, when the pressure of misfortune was withdrawn, would voluntarily bestow herself on a man of his advanced age? Perhaps so. That Agnes was less than eighteen, and himself more than thirty-five, were facts repeated to himself too often for his tranquillity.

## CHAPTER XI.

AGNES APPEARS AT CLIFTON IN A NEW CHARACTER.

At as early an hour, on the morning after her arrival at Clifton, as Agnes could hope to find her friend Mary awake, she set off for Rodney Place. It was a short walk, but a happy one, even though she had yet to learn whether Lady Elizabeth Norris and her party were or were not arrived.

But there was something at the bottom of her heart that made her very tolerably easy . . . . more so perhaps than she confessed to herself . . . . on this point. Every day made the mysterious fact of Miss Compton's being a woman of handsome fortune more familiar to her, and every hour made it more clear that she had no other object in life than to make that fortune contribute to the happiness of her niece. It followed, therefore, that, not having altogether forgotten

the fact of Colonel Hubert's declaration at a moment when all things, but his own heart, must have pleaded against her, some very comfortable ground for hope to rest upon, was discoverable in the circumstances of her present position . . . . "There will be no danger," thought she, "that when he speaks again, my answer should be such as to make him fancy himself too old for me."

The servant at Rodney Place who opened the door to Agnes, was the same who had done her the like service some dozen of times during her last visit at Clifton, but he betrayed no sign of recognition when she presented herself. In fact, the general appearance of Agnes was so greatly changed from what he had been accustomed to see it when she was clothed in the residuum of the Widow Barnaby's weeds, that till she smiled, and spoke her inquiry for Miss Peters, he had no recollection of her.

As soon, however, as he discovered that it was the Miss Willoughby who had left all his ladies crying when she went away, he took care to make her perceive that she was not forgotten by the manner in which he said, "Miss Peters, ma'am, is not come down stairs yet; but she will be very

happy to see YOU, ma'am, if you will please to walk up."

As the early visitor was of the same opinion, she scrupled not to find her way to the well-known door, and without even the ceremony of a tap, presented herself to her friend. It is probable that Mary looked more at the face and less at the dress of the visitor than the servant had done, for, uttering a cry of joy, she sprang towards her, and most affectionately folded her in a cordial embrace.

"My sweet Agnes! . . . . This is so like you! At the very instant you entered, I was calculating the probabilities between to-day and to-morrow for your arrival. Ah, little girl! . . . . Did I not tell you to address yourself to Miss Compton, of Compton Basett, long ago? What say you to my wisdom now?"

"That you were inspired, Mary, and that I deserved to suffer a good deal for not listening to such an oracle . . . . But had I done so, I should have never known . . . ."

"The difference between the extreme of Barnaby misery and Compton comfort?" said Mary, finishing the sentence for her.

Agnes blushed, but said with a happy smile, "Yes . . . . assuredly I may say so."

Miss Peters looked at her, and laughed. "There is something else you would not have known, I am very sure, Agnes, by that conscious face, . . . . and it must be something very well worth knowing by that look of radiant happiness which I never saw on your fair face before . . . . no, not even when for the first time you looked down upon Avon's dun stream; for then, if I remember rightly, your joy shewed itself in tears; but now, my dear, you are dimpling with smiles, though I really believe you are doing all you can to hide them from me. Say why is this? . . . . wherefore . . . . what should it mean?"

"Mary! . . . . There is not an event of my life, nor a thought of my heart, that I would wish to hide from you . . . . But how can I begin telling you such very long and incredible stories as I have got to tell, just as you have finished dressing, and are ready to go down to breakfast?" said Agnes.

"Breakfast?" replied her friend . . . "I would rather go without breakfast for a month than not hear the beginning, middle, and end of all your

adventures from the moment you left this house in crape and bombasin, with your cheeks as white as marble, and your eyes full of tears, up to this present now, that you have entered it again in as elegant a morning toilet as London can furnish, with your cheeks full of dimples, and your eyes dancing in your head with happiness, notwithstanding all your efforts to look demure . . . . Come, sit down again, Agnes, and tell me all."

"Tell you all I will, depend upon it, but not now, dear Mary. . . . Think of all your mother's kindness to me. . . . Shall I sit here indulging in confidential gossip with you, instead of paying my compliments to her and the rest of the family in the breakfast-room? . . . . No, positively no. So come down stairs with me directly, or I will go by myself."

"Aunt Compton is spoiling you, child; that is quite clear. . . . You used to be obedient to command, and ever ready to do as I desired, but now you lay down the law like a Lord Chancellor. Come along, then, Miss Agnes; but remember that, as soon as breakfast is over, I expect, first to be taken to the Mall (have I not got nice lodgings for you?) and

introduced to Miss Compton, of Compton Basett, and then taken to our old seat on the rock, then and there to hear all that has befallen you."

To this Agnes agreed, and they descended together. The interest and the pleasure that her entrance excited among the family group already assembled round the breakfast-table, was very gratifying to her. Mrs. Peters seemed hardly less delighted than Mary; the two girls kissed her affectionately, and gazed at her with as much admiration as astonishment, which is tantamount to saying that they admired her much; good Mr. Peters welcomed her very cordially, and inquired with the most scrupulous politeness for the health of Mrs. Barnaby; and James told her very frankly that he was delighted to see her, and that she was fifty times handsomer than ever.

The conversation that followed was perfectly frank, on the part of Agnes, in all that related to the kindness of her aunt Compton, and the happiness she enjoyed from being under her care; but, from delicacy to them, she said as little as possible about Mrs. Barnaby; and from

delicacy to herself, made no mention whatever either of Colonel Hubert or his family.

As soon as the breakfast was over Mrs. Peters declared her intention of immediately waiting on Miss Compton; an attention to her aunt which Agnes welcomed with pleasure, though it still farther postponed the much-wished for conversation with her friend Mary. The whole family declared their eagerness to be introduced to the old lady, of whom Miss Willoughby spoke with such enthusiasm; but as the discreet Mrs. Peters declared that at this first visit her eldest daughter only must accompany her; the rest yielded of necessity, and the three ladies set out together.

"I expect to find this new aunt a much more agreeable personage, my dear Agnes, than your former chaperon, though she was my dear sister. . . . But on one point I flatter myself I shall find them alike."

"I hope this point of resemblance is not of much importance to your happiness, my dear Mrs. Peters," replied Agnes, "for if it be, you are in a bad way; since night and day are infinitely less unlike than my two aunts in all things."

"Yes, but it is of great importance to my happiness, particularly for this evening, Agnes," replied Mrs. Peters. "The point of resemblance I want to find is in the trusting you to my care. We are going to a party this evening where I should particularly like to take you, . . . . and it will be impossible, you know, to arrange exchange of visits, and manage that an invitation shall be sent and accepted by aunt Compton, on such very short notice. Do you think she will let you go with us?"

"Ask her, my dear Mrs. Peters," replied Agnes with a very happy smile, "and see what she will say to it."

"I will, if I do not find her too awful," was the answer.

The manner in which Miss Compton received and entertained her visitors, was a fresh source of surprise to Agnes. Though thinking very highly of her intellect, and even of her conversational powers, she had anticipated some symptoms of reserve and shyness on the introduction of so perfect a recluse to strangers. But nothing of the kind appeared. Miss Compton was pleased by the appearance and manner

of both mother and daughter, and permitted them to perceive that she was so, rather with the easy flattering sort of courtesy with which a superior treats those whom he wishes should be pleased with him, than with any appearance of the *mauvaise honte* which might have been expected. Nor must this be condemned as unnatural, for it was, in fact, the inevitable result of the state of mind in which she had lived. With keen intellect, elastic animal spirits, and a position that places the owner of it fairly above the reach of annoyance from any one, (an elevation, by the by, that few of the great ones of the earth can boast,) it is not an introduction to any ordinary society that can discompose the mind, or agitate the manners.

Mrs. Peters did not find aunt Compton too awful, and therefore prefered her request, which, like every other that could have been made likely to promote the pleasure of Agnes, was not only graciously but gratefully complied with. A question being started as to the order in which the party should go, Mr. Peters's carriage not being able to take them all at once, Miss Compton settled it by saying,—"Agnes has

her own carriage and servants here, but she must not go alone; and perhaps, if she calls at your house, Mrs. Peters, you will have the kindness to let her friend Mary accompany her, and permit her carriage to follow yours."

This being settled, Mrs. Peters and her daughter rose to take leave; and Mary then hoped that Agnes, by returning with them, would at length give her the opportunity she so earnestly desired of hearing all she had to tell. But she was again disappointed, for when the young heiress asked her indulgent aunt whether she would not take advantage of the lovely morning to see some of the beauties of Clifton, she replied,—"I should like nothing so well, Agnes, as to take a drive with you over the beautiful downs you talk of. Will you spare her to me for so long, Miss Peters?"

"I think you deserve a little of her, Miss Compton," answered the young lady; "and with the hope of the evening before me, I will enter no protest against the morning drive."

The mother and daughter then took leave, and as they left the house, they exchanged a glance that seemed to express mutual congra-

tulation on the altered condition of their favourite.

"Well, mamma, you will be rewarded this time for obeying my commands like a dutiful mother, and permitting me to make a pet of this sweet Agnes. . . . There is nothing in the Barnaby style here. . . . I was sure Miss Compton, of Compton Basett, must be good for something," said Mary.

"If I may venture to hope, as I think I may," replied her mother, "that she will never be the means of bringing me in contact with my incomparable sister-in-law again, I may really thank you, saucy girl as you are, for having so taken the reins into your own hands. I delight in this Miss Compton. There is a racy originality about her that is very awakening. And as for your Agnes, what with her new young happiness, her graceful loveliness, now first seen to some advantage, her proud and pretty fondness for her aunt, and her natural joy at seing us all again under circumstances so delightfully altered, I really do think she is the most enchanting creature I ever beheld."

## CHAPTER XII.

A PARTY. — A MEETING. — GOOD SOMETIMES PRODUCTIVE OF EVIL.

The superintending the toilet of Agnes for the party of that evening was a new and very delightful page in the history of the spinster of Compton Basett. The fondest mother dressing a fair daughter for her first presentation, never watched the operations of the toilet more anxiously; and in her case there was a sort of personal triumph attending its success, that combined the joy of the accomplished artist, who sees the finished loveliness himself has made with the fond approval of affection.

Partly from her own native good taste, and partly from the wisdom of listening with a very discriminating judgment to the practical counsels of an experienced *modiste*, the dress of Agnes was exactly what it ought to have been;

and the proud old lady herself could not have desired an appearance more *distinguée* than that of her adopted child when, turning from Peggy and her mirror, she made her a sportive courtesy and exclaimed,—

"Have you not made a fine lady of me, aunt Betsy?"

When Miss Compton's carriage stopped at Rodney Place, it was Mrs. Peters, instead of her daughter, who took a place in it.

"Mary is excessively angry with me," said she, as they drove off, "for not letting her be your companion; but I think it more *comme il faut*, Agnes, that I should present you to Mrs. Pemberton myself. She is a vastly fine lady; .... not one of us humble Bristolian Cliftonites, who pique ourselves rather upon the elevation of our lime-stone rock above the level of the stream that laves our merchants' quays, than on any other species of superiority that we can lay claim to. Mrs. Pemberton is none of us.... She has a house in London and a park in Buckinghamshire, and flies over the Continent every now and then with first-rate aristocratical velocity; but she has one feeling,

sometimes shared by more ordinary mortals, which is a prodigious love of music. This, and a sort of *besoin*, to which she pleads guilty, of holding a salon every evening that she is not from home, forces upon her, as I take it, the necessity of visiting many of us who might elsewhere scarcely be deemed worthy to approach her foot-stool. We met her at the Parslowes, where the girls' performances elicited a very gracious degree of approbation. An introduction followed; she has honoured me by attending a concert at my own house, and this is the fourth evening we have passed with her. Now you have the *carte du pays*, and I think you will agree with me, that it is much better I should make my *entrée* with you on my arm, than permit you to follow with the damsels in my train."

Agnes confessed that she thought the arrangement much more conducive to the dignity of her approach, and thanked her companion for her thoughtful attention.

"Perhaps it is not quite disinterested, Agnes .... I am rather proud of having such an exotic to produce.... What a delightful aunt

Compton it is! . . . . Carriage perfect. . . . servants evidently town-made. . . . white satin and blonde fit for an incipient duchess! If your little head be not turned, Agnes, you will deserve to be chronicled as a miracle."

"I have had enough to steady the giddiest craft that ever was launched, my dear Mrs. Peters," replied Agnes; "and it would be silly, indeed, to throw my ballast overboard, because I am sailing before the wind."

"Then your head is not turned; . . . . that is what you mean to say, is it not?"

"No," replied Agnes, laughing, "my head is not turned,—I feel almost sure of it. . . . But why do you make such particular inquiries respecting the state of my head at present, Mrs. Peters? Shall I be called upon to give some illustrious proof of its healthy condition to-night?"

"Yes, my dear. . . . You will assuredly be called upon to sing, and you must prove to my satisfaction that you are not grown too fine to oblige your friends."

"Is that all?. . . . Depend upon it I will do whatever you wish me."

Mrs. Pemberton's drawing-room was full of company when they entered it, but that lady espied them the moment they arrived, and stepped forward with so much eagerness to receive them, that Agnes thought Mrs. Peters had, in her account of the acquaintance between them, hardly done justice to the degree of favour she had risen to. But a few minutes more convinced her, that even she, unknown as she was, might flatter herself that some portion of this distinguished reception was intended for her; for Mrs. Pemberton took her hand and led her to a seat at the upper end of the room with an air of such marked distinction, as, spite of the philosophy of which she had just been boasting, brought a very bright flush to her cheeks, if it did not turn her head. A few words, however, spoken by that lady to one of those beside whom she placed her, explained the mystery, and proved that Mrs. Peters had deemed it prudent to intimate her intention of bringing a young friend with her beforehand.

"Miss Eversham, you must permit me to introduce this young lady to you—Miss Wil-

loughby . . . . Miss Eversham . . . . From a little word in Mrs. Peter's note this morning, I flatter myself that I shall have the gratification of hearing you sing together. This lady's voice is a contralto, Miss Willoughby, and from what I have heard of your performance at Mrs. Peters', before I had the pleasure of being acquainted with her, your voices will be delightful together."

This most unexpected address was not calculated to restore the composure of Agnes, and it was not without some effort that she summoned courage enough to answer the numerous questions of Miss Eversham, (an elderly young lady too much inured to exhibition to have any mercy upon her,) when, as an excuse for withdrawing her attention for a moment, from the ceaseless catechism that tormented her, she turned away her eyes to look upon the company, and beheld the profile of Colonel Hubert, as he bent to speak to a lady seated on a sofa near which he stood. This was not an occurrence very likely to restore her composure, but at least it spared her any farther anxiety respecting the effort necessary

for receiving the attentions of her neighbour properly, for she altogether forgot her vicinity, and became as completely incapable of hearing her farther questions, as of answering them.

"Had he seen her?. . . . Did he know she was at Clifton?. . . . Was his aunt,—was Lady Stephenson there?. . . . How would he address her?. . . . Would their intercourse begin from the point at which it had broken off, or would her altered circumstances, by placing each in a new position, lead to a renewed proposal, and an answer?. . . . Oh how different from her former one!"

These were the questions that now addressed themselves to her, making her utterly incapable of hearing the continued string of musical interrogatories which went on beside her. The short interval during which Colonel Hubert retained his attitude, and continued his conversation seemed an age, and expectation was growing sick, and almost merging in despair, when at last the lady turned to answer a question from her neighbour, and Colonel Hubert stood upright and cast his eyes upon the company.

Her emotion was too powerful to permit

bashfulness to take any part in it; she sought his eye, and met it. In a moment all suffering was over, and all anxiety a thousand fold overpaid, for the look she encountered was all her heart could wish. At the first glance, indeed, he evidently did not know her; it was that of a wandering speculative eye that seemed looking out for occupation, and had she quite understood it aright, she might have perceived that it was arrested by a sort of sudden suspicion that it had found something worth pausing upon. But this lasted not above the tenth part of an instant, and then he darted forward; his fine proud countenance expressive of uncontrollable agitation, and the rapidity with which he approached her was such as to show pretty plainly that he forgot it was a crowded drawing-room he was traversing.

By the time he reached her, however, short as the interval was, the glow that had lighted up her face when it first arrested his eye had faded into extreme paleness, and when he spoke to her, she trembled so violently as to be quite unable to articulate. Colonel Hubert perceived her agitation, and felt that it ap-

proached in some degree to his own. Had he been twenty-five, this would have probably been all he wished to see; as it was, he felt a dreadful spasm at the heart, as the hateful thought occurred that after what had passed there might be two ways in which it might be interpreted. But it was a passing pang; and longing to present her to his aunt and sister, and at the same time release her from the embarrassing curiosity so conspicuous in the manner of her neighbour, he held the hand she extended to him while he said —

"Let me lead you to Lady Elizabeth, Miss Willoughby; both she and Lady Stephenson are in the next room, and will be delighted to see you."

Agnes rose, and though really hardly able to stand, replied, with all the voice she had, that she should be greatly obliged if he would lead her to them, taking his offered arm as she spoke. At this moment Sir Edward Stephenson crossed the room with his eyes fixed upon her, and with evident curiosity to find out who it was his stately brother-in-law was escorting so obsequiously. The extreme beauty

of Agnes, and the remarkable elegance of her dress and appearance had, in truth, already drawn all eyes upon her, and the whispered enquiries of many had been answered by Mrs. Pemberton, with the information that she was an heiress, and the first amateur singer in England. The foundation of these assertions had reached her by the note of the judicious Mrs. Peters, who, while asking permission to bring a young friend, took the opportunity of hinting the two interesting facts above mentioned, and the effect of their repetition among her guests doubtless added not a little to the interest with which Agnes was looked at.

Sir Edward Stephenson was among those who had heard of the heiress-ship and the voice, but the name had not reached him; and while looking at the elegant girl in white satin, who lent upon Colonel Hubert's arm, not the slightest resemblance between her and the fair girl in deep mourning that he had once or twice seen at Cheltenham occurred to him.

There was a stoppage in the door-way between the two rooms, and it was at this

moment Sir Edward said in the ear of the colonel, "Who is your fair friend?"

"Do you not know her, Sir Edward? . . . . It is Miss Willoughby."

"What the girl . . . . the person we saw at . . . . Nonsense, Montague! Who is it?"

Colonel Hubert shrugged his shoulders at the incredulity of his brother-in-law, and quietly replying, "I have told you all I know," took advantage of a movement among the crowd in the door-way, and led his fair companion through it.

In the short interval occasioned by this stoppage, Agnes so far recovered her composure as to become very keenly alive to the importance of the next few moments to her happiness.... Should Lady Elizabeth look harshly, or Lady Stephenson coldly upon her, of what avail would be all the blessings that fate and affection had showered upon her favoured head? .... And then it was that for the first time she felt the full extent of all she owed to Miss Compton; for the consciousness that she was no longer a penniless, desolate dependant came to her mind at that moment with a feeling

ten thousand times more welcome than any display of her aunt's hoarded wealth had ever brought; and the recollection that, in speaking of her to Mrs. Peters, Miss Compton had almost pompously called her "my heiress," and "the inheritor of my paternal acres, and some twenty thousand pounds beside," which at the time had in some sort been painful for her to listen to, was at that agitating moment recalled with a degree of satisfaction that might have been strangely misinterpreted had those around been aware of it.... Some might have traced the feeling to pride, and some to vain self-consequence; but, in truth, it arose from a deep-seated sense of humility that blessed anything likely to lessen the awful distance she felt between herself and Hubert in the eyes of his relations.

But with all the aid she could draw from such considerations her cheek was colourless, and her eyes full of tears when she found herself standing almost like a culprit before the dignified old lady, whose favour she had once gained in a manner so unhoped for, whom she feared she had deeply offended since,

and on whose present feelings towards her hung all her hopes of happiness in life.

It was not at the first glance that her timid but enquiring eye could learn her sentence, for the expressive countenance of the old lady underwent more than one change before she spoke. At first it very unequivocally indicated astonishment.... then came a smile that as plainly told of admiration (at which moment, by the way, her ladyship became impressed with the firmest conviction that the nose of the honourable Miss Nivett, and that of Miss Willoughby, were formed on the same model), and at last, whatever intention of reserve might have possessed her, it all melted away, and she held out both her hands with both aspect and words of very cordial welcome.

The heart of Agnes gave a bound as these words reached her; and the look of animated happiness which succeeded to the pale melancholy that sat upon her features when she first approached, touched the old lady so sensibly, that nothing but the presence of the crowd around prevented her throwing her arms around her in a fond embrace.

Lady Stephenson was from the first instant all affectionate kindness, and even Sir Edward, who had hitherto never appeared to think it necessary that his lady's singing favourite should occupy much of his attention, now put himself forward to claim her acquaintance, apologizing for not having known her at first by saying,—

"The change of dress, Miss Willoughby, must be my excuse; you have left off mourning since I saw you last."

Agnes smiled and bowed, and appeared not to have been in the least degree affronted; in fact, she was at that moment too happy to be otherwise than pleased with everybody in the world.

Meanwhile, Colonel Hubert stood looking at her with love, admiration, and astonishment, that fully equalled that of his aunt; but the contemplation did not bring him happiness. Without settling the balance very accurately in his own mind, perhaps, he had hitherto felt conscious that his station and fortune (independent at least, if not large) might be set against her youth . . . that constant stumbling-block of his felicity . . . and her surpassing beauty. But there was something in the change from

simplicity of dress, that almost approached to homeliness, to the costly elegance of costume that was now before him, which seemed to indicate a position to which his own no longer presented so very favourable a contrast. She no longer appeared to be the Agnes to obtain whom he must make a sacrifice that would prove beyond all doubt the vastness of his love, and he trembled as he beheld her the principal object of attention, and the theme of avowed admiration throughout the room.

Lady Elizabeth very unceremoniously made room for her next herself, by desiring a gentleman who occupied the seat beside her, which was on a small sofa filling the recess by the chimney, to leave it.

"I beg a thousand pardons, sir, but I see no other place in the room where we could hope for space to sit thus *tête-à-tête* together, and did you know how near and dear she was to me, you would, I am sure, excuse me."

The gentleman, though not a young one, assured her with the appearance of much sincerity that to yield a seat to such a young lady could be considered only as honour and happi-

ness by every man. Having thus established her restored favourite at her side, Lady Elizabeth began to whisper innumerable questions about Miss Compton.

"How came it, my dear," said she, "that when opening your heart to Emily and me upon the subject of your unfortunate situation with Mrs. Barnaby, you never referred to the possibility of placing yourself under the protection of Miss Compton?"

"Because my aunt Compton having quarrelled with my aunt Barnaby had refused to take any further notice of me,—Mrs. Barnaby at least led me to believe during the six or seven months I passed with her, that every application on my part to Miss Compton would be vain, . . . . and it was only the dreadful predicament into which Mrs. Barnaby's arrest threw me, that gave me the desperate courage which I thought necessary for applying to her. But I have since learned, Lady Elizabeth, that at any time, one word from me would have sufficed to make her leave her retirement, as she now has done, and remove me from my dreadful situation."

"But it appears that she is not only a kind aunt, but a wealthy one, my dear child. . . . Excuse the observation, Agnes, . . . . situated as we now are together, you cannot deem it impertinent, . . . . but your dress indicates as great and as favourable a change in pecuniary matters, as your letter, and your happy countenance, announces in all others. . . . Miss Compton, I presume, is a woman of fortune?"

"Her fortune is larger than I imagined it to be," replied Agnes. "She lived with great economy before she adopted me."

"And do you know what her intentions are, Agnes?" rejoined the persevering old lady. "It is only as the aunt of Colonel Hubert . . . . remember this, my dear . . . . it is only as Colonel Hubert's aunt that I ask the question."

Agnes blushed with most happy consciousness as she replied. "The interest you so kindly take in me confers both honour and happiness, and however averse to boast of the kindness bestowed, and promised by my dear aunt, I can have no wish to hide from you, Lady Elizabeth, all she has said to me. She knows the honour that has been done me by

Colonel Hubert, and knows too, that nothing but the fear of your displeasure could have made me hesitate to accept it; . . . . and she says, that should no such displeasure interfere, she would bestow a fortune on me."

"Well, my dear, . . . . I don't believe that any such displeasure is likely to interfere. When will you introduce us to her?"

"To-morrow, Lady Elizabeth!" . . . . Agnes eagerly replied, "if you will give us leave to wait upon you."

"Yes, that is right, my dear, quite right. . . . She must call on me first, . . . . and yet I am not quite sure of that either. . . . I rather think the friends of the gentleman should wait upon the friends of the lady, . . . . and so I will call upon her to-morrow morning, and remember, when you have introduced us to each other, you may go away; we must talk on business. What is her address?"

Agnes gave the address very distinctly, which was repeated in the same manner by Lady Elizabeth, just as Mrs. Pemberton approached to entreat her permission to lead her to the pianoforte. "You are going to sing, my dear child!

Very good. . . . I shall be delighted to hear you. . . . And you must get me a place where I can both look at, and listen to her, Mrs. Pemberton," said Lady Elizabeth.

Considerably surprised, but much pleased to find that the acquaintance she had condescended to make with Mrs. Peters had led to her having the honour of receiving so intimate a friend and favourite of her most illustrious guest, Mrs. Pemberton rather ostentatiously performed the service required of her, and Agnes once more stood up to sing with Lady Elizabeth's arm-chair almost as near to her as on the happy night when she first won the old lady's heart at Cheltenham.

But where was Colonel Hubert? . . . . He had stood anxiously watching the first few words that passed between his aunt and Agnes; and when he saw her cavalier dismission of her neighbour, and the cordial style of amity with which she pursued her conversation with the beautiful interloper, he almost forgot his doubts and fears in the happiness of seeing one obstacle so decidedly removed, and prudently denying himself the pleasure of being near them, lest

his presence might render the conversation less confidential, he withdrew to the other room, and only appeared again before the eyes of Agnes when he took his place beside her to turn over the pages of her song.

For the first few moments Agnes feared that she was too happy to sing; . . . . but she tried, and found that her voice was clear, and was determined that it should soon be steady, for she wished . . . . let youthful ladies judge how ardently . . . . to renew the impression which she had made on Colonel Hubert on that never-to-be-forgotten morning when she first dared to fancy he loved her.

Nor were her wishes vain. She sang as well, and he felt as strongly as before. Her pleasure as she watched this was perfect, but his was very far from being so; he saw that she was the centre of attraction, and not only, as before, the admired of every eye, and the enchanter of every ear, but also the most distinguished, fashionable, and important young lady present.

There was not, however, a shadow of the paltry feeling called jealousy in this; the pang that smote his heart arose from memory, and not from imagination. Could he, as he now

saw this elegant girl the centre of fashion, and the petted favourite of his own proud aunt, forget the generous devoted passion of the unfortunate Frederic? Could he forget that he had used all the influence which the young man's affection to himself had lent him, to make him abandon an attachment so every way calculated to ensure his happiness? . . . . Could he forget that Frederic was now living an exile from his country, the victim of unhappy love, while he, his trusted confidant, but most pernicious adviser, remained to profit by the absence he himself had caused, and to drain the cup of happiness which his hand had dashed from the lips of his wretched friend?

As long as Mrs. Barnaby continued to hang about her, and in some degree to overshadow her with the disgrace of her vulgar levity, Agnes could not be loved without a sacrifice, and the youth and splendid fortune of Frederic Stephenson, as well as the peculiarly strong feelings of his family on the subject, might have stood as reasons why another, less fettered by circumstances, might have married her, though he could not. But how stood the matter now? Agnes had been snatched from Mrs. Barnaby,

and borne completely beyond the sphere of her influence; Stephenson's proud brother seemed to bow before her, while his wife selected her as a chosen friend; and worse, a thousand times worse than all the rest, he had learnt, while he wandered among the company before the music commenced, that Agnes was the proclaimed heiress of fifteen hundred a-year. This last, however, for his comfort, he did not believe; but there was enough without it, to make him feel that, should he even be so blessed as to teach her to forget the difference of their age, and make her young heart his own, he must, by becoming her husband, appear to the friend who had trusted him, as one of the veriest traitors under heaven.

Such thoughts were enough to jar the sweetest harmony; and the evening was altogether productive of more pain than pleasure to the unfortunate Colonel Hubert, who having staked his happiness on a marriage, only to be obtained by the consent of his aunt, was now suffering martyrdom from a plethora of success, and would have gladly changed his condition back to what it had been when, regardless of consequences, he had laid his heart at the feet of

Agnes by the light of her one tallow-candle in Half-moon Street, while her sole protectress lay imprisoned in the Fleet.

When the party broke up, Colonel Hubert, leaving his aunt to the care of Sir Edward, escorted Mrs. Peters and the four young ladies down stairs, where another shock awaited him on hearing her servant enquire which carriage should be called up first, for before answering, Mrs. Peters turned to Agnes, and said,—

"To which name are your servants accustomed to answer, my dear? Miss Compton told me you would have your own carriage here, but perhaps this might only be another mode of saying you would have hers. Shall they call Miss Compton's carriage, or Miss Willoughby's, Agnes?"

"They will answer to either, I believe," replied Agnes, carelessly, for she was waiting for Colonel Hubert to finish something he was saying to her.

"Call Miss Willoughby's carriage, then," said Mrs. Peters to the servants in waiting. . . . And "Miss Willoughby's carriage! Miss Willoughby's carriage!" resounded along the hall, and through the street.

## CHAPTER XIII.

DEMONSTRATING THE HEAVY SORROW WHICH MAY BE PRODUCED BY A YOUNG LADY'S HAVING A LARGER FORTUNE THAN HER LOVER EXPECTED.

Miss Compton was not long kept waiting for the appearance of her promised visitor on the following morning, for before twelve o'clock Lady Elizabeth Norris arrived. Agnes very punctually obeyed the commands that had been given her, and having properly introduced the two old ladies to each other, left them together, and hastened at length to satisfy the anxious curiosity of her friend Mary, by giving her a full account of all the circumstances that had led to the happy change in her prospects.

Her tale was listened to with unbroken attention, and when it was ended Miss Peters exclaimed—

"Now then, I forgive you, Agnes, and only

now, for not returning the love of that very pleasant person Frederic Stephenson; .... for I do believe it is nearly impossible for a young lady to be in love with two gentlemen at once, and I now perceive beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the superb colonel turned your head from the very first moment that you looked .... not up on, but up to him. How very strange it is," she continued, "that I should never have suspected the cause of that remarkable refusal! .... I imagine my dulness arose from my humility; I was conscious myself that I should quite as soon have taken the liberty of falling in love with the autocrat of all the Russias, as with Colonel Hubert, and it therefore never occurred to me that you could be guilty of such audacity; nevertheless, I will not deny that he is a husband to be proud of ... and so I wish you joy heartily. ... But do tell me," she added after a moment's meditation, "how you mean to manage about Mr. Stephenson? .... Your first meeting will be rather awkward, will it not?"

"I fear so," replied Agnes, gravely. "But there is no help for it, and I must get over

it as well as I can . . . . fortunately none of the family have the slightest idea of any such thing, and I hope they never will."

"I hope so, too, dear. But it would be very unpleasant, would it not? if, upon hearing what is going on, he were to burst in among you, and insist upon shooting Colonel Hubert."

This was said playfully, and without a shadow of serious meaning; but it rendered Agnes extremely uneasy, and it required some skill and perseverance on the part of Miss Peters to remove the effect of what she had said. There were, however, too many pleasant points of discourse among the multitude of subjects before them, for her young spirits to cling long to the only one that seemed capable of giving her pain, and on the whole their long and uninterrupted conference was highly gratifying to them both.

While this was going on in Rodney Place, something of the same kind, but without any drawback at all, was proceeding in the Mall, between the two old ladies, the result of which may be given more shortly by relating what passed between Lady Elizabeth and her nephew

afterwards, than by following them through the whole of their very interesting, but somewhat desultory conversation.

Colonel Hubert was awaiting the return of his aunt with much anxiety; an anxiety, by the way, which proceeded wholly from the fear that what she might have to report should prove his Agnes to be *un meilleur parti* than he wished to find her. This singular species of uneasiness was in no degree lessened by the aspect of the old lady as she entered the drawing-room in which he was waiting to receive her.

"This is a very singular romance, Montague, as ever I remember to have heard of," she began. "Here is this pretty creature, who was introduced to us as niece and adopted child, as I fancied, of the vulgarest and most atrociously absurd woman in England, without money or wit enough to keep her out of jail, and now she turns out to be a young lady of large fortune, perfectly well educated, and well descended on both sides of her house . . . . and all this, too, without any legerdemain, *denouements*, or discoveries. . . . I wish you joy

heartily, Montague. . . . Her fortune is exactly what was wanted to make yours comfortable . . . . she has fifteen hundred a year, part of which is, by Miss Compton's account, a very improvable estate in Devonshire;—but I suspect the old lady will like to give a name to your second son, or should you have no second son, to a daughter. Nor can I blame her for this. By her account, Compton of Compton Basett has endured long enough in the land to render the wish that it should not pass away a very reasonable one; especially for the person who holds, and has to bequeath the estate, to which it has for centuries been annexed; so that point, I presume, you will not cavil at. You must take care, however, that the liberal-minded old gentlewoman, in making this noble settlement on her niece, does not leave herself too bare. . . . She talked of the *trifle* that would follow at her death. . . . This ought not to be a trifle, and were I you, Montague, I would insist that the amount settled on Agnes at your marriage should not exceed one thousand a-year. . . . This, with the next step in your profession, will make your

income a very sufficient one, even without the regiment which you have such fair reason to hope for."

During the whole of this harangue, Colonel Hubert was suffering very severely; till by the time her ladyship had concluded, his imagination became so morbidly alive, that he almost fancied himself already in the presence of his injured friend . . . . he fancied him hastening home to be a witness at his marriage, and gazing with a cold reproachful eye as the beauty, the wealth, the connexions of Agnes were all shewn to be exactly what his friends would have approved for him, had not a false, a base, an interested adviser, contrived to render vain his generous and honourable love, that he might win the precious prize himself.

What a picture was this for such a mind as Hubert's to contemplate! . . . . Had not Lady Elizabeth been exceedingly occupied by the curious and unexpected discoveries she had made concerning the race and the rents of the Comptons, she must have perceived how greatly the effect of her statement was the reverse of pleasurable to her auditor; but in truth her

attention was not fixed upon him, but upon Miss Compton, whom she considered as one of the most remarkable originals she had ever met with, and ceased not to congratulate herself upon the happy chance which had turned her yielding kindness to her nephew into a source of so much interesting speculation to herself .... Receiving no answer to the speech she had made, she added very good-humouredly,—

"That 's all, Mr. Benedict.... Now you may depart to look for the young lady, and you may tell her, if you please, that upon the whole I very much doubt if the united kingdoms might not be ransacked through, without finding any one I should more completely approve in all ways as the wife of Montague Hubert. ... Poor Sir Edward!.... How he will wish that all his anxieties respecting his hare-brained brother had been brought to a termination by the young man's having had the wit to fall in love with this sweet girl instead of you;.... but I doubt if Frederick Stephenson has sufficient taste and refinement of mind to appreciate such a girl as Agnes..... He probably overlooked her altogether, or perhaps amused himself more

by quizzing the absurdities of the aunt, than by paying any particular attention to her delicate and unobtrusive niece. It required such a mind as yours, Montague, to overcome all the apparent obstacles and objections with which she was surrounded. . . . I honour you for it, and so, perhaps, will your giddy-headed friend too, when he comes to know her. She is a gem that we shall all have reason to be proud of."

Colonel Hubert could bear no more, but muttering something about wishing immediately to write letters, he hurried out of the room, and shut himself into the parlour which had been appropriated to his morning use. Without giving himself time to think very deliberately of the comparative good and evil that might ensue, he seized a pen, and wrote the following letter to Mr. Stephenson.

"Dear Frederic,

"We parted painfully, and my regard for you is too sincere for me to endure the idea of meeting again with equal pain. I have had reason since you left England, to believe, that notwithstanding the very objectionable manners and conduct of Mrs.

Barnaby, her niece, Miss Willoughby, is in every way worthy of the attachment you conceived for her; nay, that her family and fortune are such as even your brother and sisters would approve. I will not conceal from you that there are others who have discovered (though not so early as yourself) the attractions and the merits of Miss Willoughby; but who can say, Frederick, that if your early and generous devotion were made known to her, she might not give you the preference over those who were less prompt in surrendering their affections than yourself? If, then, your feelings towards her continue to be the same as when we parted at our breakfast table at Clifton . . . . and this I cannot doubt, for Agnes is not formed to be loved once, and then forgotten. . . . if you still love her, Frederick, hasten home, and take the advantage which your early conceived and unhesitating affection gives you over those who saw her more than once, before they discovered how important she was to their happiness.

"Notwithstanding the impatience with which you listened to my remonstrances on the sub-

ject of a connexion with Mrs. Barnaby, I believe that they were in truth the cause of your abandoning a pursuit in which your heart was deeply interested; and so believing, I cannot rest till I have told you that a marriage with Miss Willoughby no longer involves the necessity of any personal intercourse with Mrs. Barnaby. They are separated, and probably for ever.

"Believe me, now and for ever,

"Very faithfully your friend,

"MONTAGUE HUBERT."

The effort necessary for writing and dispatching this letter by the post, was of service to him; it tended to make him feel more reconciled to himself, and less impatient under the infliction of hearing the favoured position of Miss Willoughby descanted upon. But much anxiety, much suffering, still remained. . . . How should he again meet Agnes? . . . . Despite a thousand dear suspicions to the contrary, he could not wholly conquer the belief that it was her indifference, or some feeling connected with the disparity of their age, which dictated

the too-well-remembered words. . . . "I never will be your wife;" and his best consolation under the terrible idea that he had recalled a rival to compete with him, arose from feeling that if, when his own proposals and those of Frederic were both before her, she should bestow herself on him, he might and must believe that, spite of his thirty-five years, she loved him; . . . . but though he hailed such comfort as might be got from this, it could not enable him to see Agnes, while this uncertainty remained, without such a degree of restraint as must convert all intercourse with her into misery.

Agnes meanwhile was indulging herself with all the happy confidence of youthful friendship in relating to her friend everything that had happened since they parted, and returned to the Mall soon after Lady Elizabeth had left it, with a heart glowing with love, gratitude, hope, and joy. The narrative with which Miss Compton welcomed her, was just all she wished and expected; and when told that the evening was to be passed at the lodgings of Lady Elizabeth Norris, she thanked the delighted old lady for

the intelligence with a kiss that spoke her gladness better than any words could have done.

The evening came, and found the aunt and niece ready to keep their engagement, with such an equality of happiness expressed in the countenance of each, as might leave it doubtful which enjoyed the prospect of it the most. The pretty dress of Agnes, with all its simplicity, was rather more studied than usual; and it was the consciousness of this, perhaps, which occasioned her to blush so beautifully when Miss Compton made her a laughing compliment upon the delicate style of it . . . .

"You look like a lily, my Agnes!" said the old lady, gazing at her with fond admiration. "You have certainly got very tired of black, my dear child, for I perceive that whenever you wish to look very nice, you select unmixed white for your decoration."

"I think it best expresses the change in my condition," replied Agnes. "Oh! my dear aunt, . . . . how *very*, *very* happy you have made me!"

Nothing could be more gratifying than the manner in which they were received by Lady

Elizabeth, Lady Stephenson, and Sir Edward; .... but Colonel Hubert was not in the drawing-room when they entered. For a short time, however, his absence was not regretted, even by Agnes, as she was not sorry for the opportunity it gave her of receiving the affectionate congratulations of her future sister, and it was with a feeling likely to produce much lasting love between them, that the one related, and the other listened to, the history of Colonel Hubert's return from London, of his first bold avowal of his love to his aunt, and of the comfort he had found in the reception given to this avowal by Lady Stephenson herself; .... but still Colonel Hubert came not; and at length Lady Elizabeth exclaimed, with a spice of her usual vivacity, ....

"Upon my word, I believe that Montague is writing an account of his felicity to every officer in the British army. .... He darted out of the room this morning before I had half finished what I had to say to him. .... He hardly spoke three words while dinner lasted, and off he was again as soon as the cloth was removed, and each time something about writing letters was

the only intelligible words I got from him. . . . I wish you would go, Sir Edward, and see if he is writing letters now, . . . . and I will ring for tea . . . . I mean to make Montague sing to-night with Agnes. Emily has taken care that you should have a good piano, my dear. . . . and you must take care that, while I stay here, I have music enough to make up for the loss of my menagerie, . . . . for I don't think I shall begin collecting again just yet."

Sir Edward obeyed the old lady's wishes, and when the tea was half over, returned with his brother-in-law. This was the first time that Colonel Hubert had been seen by Miss Compton, and the moment was not a favourable one for removing the idea which she had originally conceived, of his being too old for the lover and husband of her beautiful niece. He was looking pale, harassed, and fatigued; but while Agnes feared only that he might be unwell, her aunt, though she could not deny that he was a gentleman of a most noble presence, (it was thus she expressed herself in speaking of him to Mrs. Peters,) thought that it was strange so young a girl should have fixed her fancy upon

him, in preference to all the world beside. In fact, Miss Compton's notions of a lover being drawn solely from the imaginary models she had made acquaintance with among her bees and flowers, she would have been better pleased to see a bright-eyed youth of twenty-one as the hero of her own romance, than the dignified but melancholy man who now stood before her. Having received his salutation, and returned it with that tone and look of intelligent cheerfulness which redeemed all she said from any imputation of want of polish, or deficiency of high-bred elegance, she turned her eyes on the face of Agnes, and there she read such speaking testimony of love and admiration, that all her romantic wishes for her perfect bliss were satisfied; and following the direction of those speaking eyes, and once more examining the features and person of Hubert, she satisfied herself by the conviction, that if not young, he was supremely elegant; and that if his complexion had lost its bloom, his manners had attained a degree of dignity superior, as she thought, to anything described among the young gentlemen whose images were familiar to her imagination.

It was slowly that Colonel Hubert approached Agnes, and mournfully that he gazed upon her; but there was to her feelings a pleasure in his presence, which for a long time prevented her being fully conscious that he, on his part, was not so happy as she had hoped it was in her power to make him. By degrees, however, the conviction of this sad truth made its way to her heart, and from that moment her joy and gladness faded, drooped, and died away, like a flower into which a gnawing worm has found its way, and nestled in the very core. This did not happen on this first evening of their meeting under the roof of Lady Elizabeth, for Agnes indulged her with every song she desired to hear. Lady Stephenson sang too, nor could Colonel Hubert refuse to join them, so that to the unsuspicious Agnes that evening seemed delightful; but a silent, melancholy walk on the following morning, made her ask herself where was the ardent love for which he had pleaded in Half-Moon Street? . . . . Had she mistaken him when he said that his happiness depended wholly on her? . . . . And if not, what was it had turned him thus to stone?

Poor Agnes! . . . . she could have no confident in this new sorrow. Her aunt Compton and her friend Mary had both spoken of him as too old to be a lover; and did she breathe to either a fear that his affection had already grown cold, might they not tell her that it was but natural? . . . . Such words she thought would break her heart, for every hour he became dearer to her than before, as she saw he was unhappy; and, thinking more of him than of herself, mourned more for his sorrow, of which she knew nothing, than for her own, though it was rapidly undermining her health and destroying her bloom.

## CHAPTER XIV.

RETURNS TO MRS. BARNABY, AND RELATES SOME OF THE MOST INTERESTING AND INSTRUCTIVE SCENES OF HER LIFE, TOGETHER WITH SEVERAL CIRCUMSTANCES RELATIVE TO ONE DEARER TO HER THAN HERSELF.

THE real heroine of this love story has been left too long, and it is necessary we should return to see in what way her generous friendship for Mr. O'Donagough was likely to end. Having kept her promise, and paid the debt for which he had been detained, as well as comforted him by the farther loan of 2*l.* 10*s.* 4*d.*, she stated to him her intention of remaining for a month longer at her lodgings in Half Moon-street, adding, with a degree of *naïveté* that O'Donagough felt to be extremely touching—

"Let this be a month of probation, my dear friend, for us both. We met under circumstances too much calculated to soften the heart for either of us, perhaps, to be able fairly to judge how we may feel when those circumstances are past. Let me see as much of you as your occupations will permit . . . . I shall dine at five o'clock, because the evenings are drawing in, and I don't love candle-light before dinner . . . . You will always find a steak or a chop, and a little brandy and water, or something of that sort . . . . And now adieu! . . . . This is a disagreeable place to pay or receive visits in, and I flatter myself that I now leave it for ever."

Let the most glowing gratitude that heart can feel be set forth in words of fluent eloquence such as befit the class to which Mr. O'Donagough belonged, and the answer which he gave to this speech will be the product.

Nevertheless, Mr. O'Donagough knew what it meant perfectly well. It meant that the Widow Barnaby, although she had made up her mind to give herself and whatever she might happen to possess to a husband, and although

she was exceedingly well inclined to let that husband be Mr. Patrick O'Donagough, she did not intend to go thus far in manifesting her favour towards him, without knowing a little more than she did at present respecting the state of his affairs. In a word, he perceived, as he repeated to himself, with an approving smile—

> That though on *marriage* she was bent,
> She had a prudent mind.

Nor was he, notwithstanding the little irregularities into which he had heretofore fallen, unworthy of becoming an object of tender attention to Mrs. Barnaby. Much as he admired her, he had steeled his soul to the virtuous resolution of putting a sudden stop to all farther intercourse between them, should he find upon inquiry that prudence did not justify its continuance.

Whatever deficiency of wisdom, therefore, the conduct of either had before shown, it was evident that both were now actuated by a praiseworthy spirit of forethought that ought to have ensured the felicity of their future years.

It will be evident to all who study the state of the widow's mind at this period, that she had considerably lowered the tone of her hopes and expectations from the moment she became aware of the defection of Lord Mucklebury. The shock which her hopes had received by the disagreeable *denouement* of her engagement with Major Allen had been perfectly cured, at least for a time, by the devotion of the noble Viscount; and so well satisfied was she herself at an escape which had left her free to aim at a quarry so infinitely higher, that what had been a mortification turned to a triumph, and she enjoyed the idea, that when "she seemed to slip," she had so gloriously recovered herself as to leave Mrs. Peters, and other envious wonderers, cause to exclaim, "She rises higher half her length!" . . . . But from the time this coroneted bubble burst, her courage fell. Her arrest was another blow . . . Mr. Morrison's desertion one heavier still; and, little as she cared for Agnes, or, in truth, for anybody living but herself, the manner of her departure vexed and humbled her.

"That crooked hag," thinks she, "has made

me truckle to her!" she exclaimed, as her aunt and her niece drove off, on the night that Agnes first took up her abode with Miss Compton . . . "She thinks that because she spent some of her beggar's money to hire a carriage in order to bully me, I shall count myself despised and forsaken. But the spiteful old maid shall hear of my being married again, and that will be wormwood, I'll answer for it."

It was in this spirit that she set about inquiring into the private character and prospects of young Mr. O'Donagough, and her first step in the business showed at once her judgment and her zeal.

In the history he had given of himself, he had spoken of a certain most respectable bookseller, who, (as he modestly hinted,) knowing his worth, and the exemplary manner in which he had turned from horse-racing to preaching, had exerted himself in the kindest manner to obtain some situation for him that should atone for the severity of his father. It was to him he had owed the engagement as domestic chaplain in the family of the nobleman formerly mentioned, and it was to him Mrs. Barnaby ad-

dressed herself for information that might lead to an engagement of still greater importance.

It was not, however, her purpose that her real object should be known, and she, therefore, framed her inquiries in such a manner as to lead Mr. Newbirth to suppose that her object was to obtain either a teacher or a preacher for her family circle.

Having made it known that she wished a few minutes private conversation with the principal, she was shown into a parlour by one of the clerks, and civilly requested to sit down for a few minutes till Mr. Newbirth could wait upon her. It must be the fault of every individual so placed, if such few minutes have not turned to good account; for the table of this exemplary publisher was covered elbow-deep in tracts, sermons, missionary reports, mystical magazines, and the like; but as Mrs. Barnaby was not habitually a reader, she did not profit so much as she might have done by her situation, and, before Mr. Newbirth's arrival, had begun to think the "few minutes" mentioned by his clerk were unusually long ones.

At length, however, he appeared, and then it

was impossible to think she had waited too long for him, for the gentle suavity of his demeanour made even a moment of his presence invaluable.

"You have business with me, madam?" he said, with his heels gracefully fixed together, and his person bent forward in humble salutation, as far as was consistent with the safety of his nose . . . "Pray do not rise. I have now five minutes that I can spare, without neglecting any serious duty;" and so saying, he placed himself opposite to the lady in act to listen.

"I have taken the liberty of waiting upon you, sir," replied Mrs. Barnaby, a little alarmed at the hint that her business must be completed in the space of five minutes, "in order to make some inquiries respecting a Mr. O'Donagough, who is, I believe, known to you."

"Mr. O'Donagough? The Reverend Mr. O'Donagough, madam?"

The widow, though well disposed to enlarge her knowledge, and extend the limits of her principles, was not yet fully initiated into the mysteries of regenerated ordinations, and therefore replied, as the daughter of an English

clergyman might well be excused for doing—"No, sir . . . the gentleman I mean is Mr. Patrick O'Donagough; he was not brought up to the church."

But there was something in the phrase, "*brought up* to the church," that grated against the feelings of Mr. Newbirth, and his brow contracted, and his voice became exceedingly solemn, as he said, "I know Mr. Patrick O'Donagough, who, like many other shining lights, was not *brought up to the church;* but has, nevertheless, received the title of reverend from the congregation which has the best right to bestow it, even that to which he has been called to preach."

Mrs. Barnaby was not slow in perceiving her mistake, and proceeded with her inquiries in such a manner as to prove that she was not unworthy to intercommune either with Mr. Newbirth himself, or any of those to whom he extended his patronage. The result of the interview was highly satisfactory; for though it seemed clear that Mr. Newbirth was aware of the vexatious accident which had for some months checked the young preacher's career,

it was equally evident, that the circumstance made no unfavourable impression, and Mrs. Barnaby returned to her lodgings with the pleasing conviction that now, at least, there could be no danger in giving way to the tender feeling which had so repeatedly beguiled her. "The reverend Mr. O'Donagough" would look very well in the paragraph which she was determined should record her marriage in the Exeter paper; and being quite determined that the three hundred and twenty-seven pounds per annum, which still remained of her income, should be firmly settled on herself, she received her handsome friend, when he arrived at the hour of dinner, in a manner which showed he had lost nothing in her esteem since they parted.

It had so happened, that within half an hour of the widow's quitting the shop of Mr. Newbirth, Mr. O'Donagough entered it. His patron received him very graciously, and failed not to mention the visit he had received, which, though not elucidated by the lady's leaving any name, was perfectly well understood by the person principally concerned.

There are some men who might have felt

offended by learning that such a means of improving acquaintance had been resorted to; but its effect on Mr. O'Donagough was exactly the reverse. His respect and estimation for the widow were infinitely increased thereby; for though still a young man, he had considerable experience, and he felt assured, that if Mrs. Barnaby had not something to bestow besides her fair fat hand, she would have been less cautious in letting it follow where it was so certain her heart had gone before.

The conviction thus logically obtained, assisted the progress of the affair very essentially. Having learnt from Mr. Newbirth that the place he had lost by the ill-timed arrest was filled by another who was not likely to give it up again, he once more contrived to make his way to the presence of his father, and gave him very clearly to understand, that the very best thing he could do would be once more to furnish the means for his departure from Europe.

"That you may spend it again at the gaming-table, you audacious scamp!" responded his noble but incensed progenitor.

"Not so, sir," replied the soft-voiced young

preacher ; " you are not yet aware of the change in my principles, or you would have no such injurious suspicion."

" As to your principles, Pat," replied his lordship, beguiled into a smile by the sanctified solemnity of his versatile son, " I do not comprehend how you could change them, seeing that you never had any."

" Then, instead of principles, sir, let me speak of practice: it is now several months since I exchanged the race-course, the billiard-table, and the dice-box, for the course of an extemporary preacher. I am afraid, my lord, that your taste rather leads you to performances of a different kind, or I would ask you to attend the meeting at which I am to expound next Wednesday evening, after which you could hardly doubt, I imagine, the sincerity of my conversion."

" It would be putting your eloquence to rather a severe test, Master Patrick. But if you have really got a church to preach in at home, why, in the devil's name, should you bother me again about going abroad ?"

" Because, my lord, I have no fixed stipend,

or any other honest and safe means of getting my bread, and also because there are many other reasons which make it desirable that I should leave this country."

"That at least is likely enough, to be sure, Mr. O'Donagough. But have the kindness to tell me what security you would give me for taking yourself off, if I were again to furnish the means for it."

This was exactly the point to which the reformed son wished to bring the yielding father; for it was not difficult to show many reasons for believing that he was in earnest in his intention to depart with as little delay as possible. It was with great caution, however, that he hinted at the possibility of his taking a lady with him as his wife, whose fortune was sufficient to prevent the necessity of his returning again to beg for bread, even at the risk of liberty or life; for he feared that if he confessed the prosperous state of his matrimonial hopes, they might be held sufficient for his necessities. But here he was mistaken; for no sooner did his father discover that his case was not quite desperate, than he manifested a considerable softening, and be-

fore a fortnight had expired, Mr. O'Donagough was able to convince the enamoured widow that, in uniting her destiny to his, she would be yielding to no sinful weakness, but securing both her temporal and eternal felicity on the firmest footing possible. And now every thing went on in so prosperous a manner, as almost to disprove the truth of the oft-quoted assertion of the poet,

"The course of true love never did run smooth;"

for the loves of Mr. O'Donagough and Mrs. Barnaby met with not even a pebble of opposition as they ran evenly on towards matrimony.

This peaceful and pleasant progress was not a little assisted by a visit which the prudent peer deemed it advisable to make to the intended bride. Nothing could be more agreeable to the feelings of the lady than this attention, nothing more advantageous to the interests of both parties than the result. His lordship ascertained to a certainty that the widow had wherewithal to feed his son, and most obligingly took care that it should be so secured as to place her fortune be-

yond the reach of any relapse on his part, while the fair lady herself, amidst all the gentle sweetness with which she seemed to let his lordship manage every thing, took excellent care of herself.

One thing only now remained to be settled before the marriage took place, and this was the obtaining an appointment as missionary to a congregation newly established in a beautiful part of Australia, where there was every reason to suppose that a large and brilliant society would soon give as much *éclat* to the successful efforts of an eloquent preacher as could be hoped for in the most fashionable *réunion* of saints in the mother country. The appointment was, in effect, left in the hands of one or two, whose constant exertions, and never-let-any-thing-escape-them habits, made them of personal importance in every decision of the kind. This little committee agreed to meet at Mr. Newbirth's on a certain evening, for the purpose of being introduced to Mrs. Barnaby, and it was understood among them, that if they found reason to be satisfied with her principles, and probable usefulness in a new congregation, the appointment

should be given to Mr. O'Donagough, whose approaching marriage with her was well known to them all.

Mrs. Newbirth, who was quite a model of a wife, and who, therefore, shared all her husband's peculiar notions respecting things in heaven and earth, very obligingly lent her assistance at this important session, both to prevent Mrs. Barnaby's feeling herself awkward, as being the only lady present, and because it was reasonably supposed that she might be useful in giving the conversation such a turn as should elicit some of the more hidden, but not, therefore, the least important traits of female character.

It was not intended that either Mr. O'Donogough or his intended bride should be aware of the importance attached to this tea-drinking in Mr. Newbirth's drawing-room; but the expectant missionary had not lived thirty years in this wicked world for nothing; and though the invitation was given in the most impromptu style possible, he instantly suspected that the leaders of the congregation, who were about to send out the mission, intended to make this an

opportunity for discovering what manner of woman the future Mrs. O'Donagough might be. Considerable anxiety was the consequence of this idea in the mind of Mr. O'Donagough. He liked the thoughts of preaching and lecturing to the ladies and gentlemen of Modeltown, and therefore determined to spare no pains in preparing the widow for the trial that awaited her. He found her by no means unapt at receiving the hints he gave respecting several important articles of faith, which, although new to her, she seemed willing enough to adopt without much inquiry, but he had a hard struggle before he could obtain the straightening of a single ringlet, or the paling, in the slightest degree, the tint of her glowing rouge. At length, however, the contest ended by his declaring that, without her compliance on this point, he should feel it his duty, passionately as he adored her, to delay their marriage till she could be induced, for his sake, to conform herself a little more to the customs and manners of the sect to which he belonged. Mrs. Barnaby's heart was not proof against such a remonstrance as this; her resolution melted into tears, and she promised that if

he never would utter such cruel words again, he should dress her hair himself in any manner he would choose. "As to my rouge," she added, "I have only worn it, my dear O'Donagough, because I consider it as the appendage of a woman of fashion . . . . . but I will wear much less, that is to say, almost none at all, for the fashion, if such shall be your wish."

"Thank you my dear, . . . . . that's all right, and I'll never plague you about it, after I once get the appointment; only do what I bid you to-night, and we'll snap our fingers at them afterwards."

The party assembled at Mr. Newbirth's consisted of himself and his lady, and four gentlemen belonging to "the congregation" which was to be propitiated. After the tea and coffee had disappeared, Mr. Newbirth, who was the only gentleman in the company (except her own O'Donagough) with whom Mrs. Barnaby was personally acquainted, opened the conversation, by asking if the change of residence which she contemplated, from one side of the world to the other, was an agreeable prospect to her.

"Very much so indeed!" was the reply.

"I suppose you are aware, ma'am," observed Mr. Littleton, who was senior clerk in a banking house, and the principal lay orator of the congregation—"I suppose you are aware that you are going among a set of people who, though decidedly the most interesting portion of the human race in the eyes of all true Christians, are nevertheless persons accustomed heretofore to habits of irregular, not to say licentious living . . . . . How do you think, ma'am, that you shall like to fall into habits of friendship and intimacy with such?"

Mr. O'Donagough listened with a good deal of anxiety for the answer: but it was a point on which he had given his affianced bride very ample instructions, and she did not disgrace her teacher.

"My notions upon that point, sir," she replied, "are rather particular, I believe; for so far from thinking the worse of my fellow creatures because they have done wrong, I always think that is the very reason why I should seek their company, and exert myself in all ways to do

them good, and to make them take their place among the first and greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

A murmur of applause ran round the little circle as Mrs. Barnaby concluded her speech, and Mr. Littleton, in particular, expressed his approbation of her sentiments in a manner that inspired the happy O'Donagough with the most sanguine hopes of success.

"I never heard better sense, or sounder principles, or more christian feelings, in the whole course of my life, than what this lady has now expressed; and I will take upon me to say, gentlemen, without making any new difficulty about the matter, that any minister going out to Sydney in the holy and reverend character of a missionary, sent by an independent congregation of devotional men, with such a wife in his hand as this good lady will be sure to make, will do more good in his generation, than all the bishops and archbishops that ever were consecrated after the manner of the worn-out superstitions of by-gone ages. Gentlemen!" . . . . . he continued, rising from his chair, "I do, therefore, forthwith propose the immediate election of the reverend Patrick

O'Donagough to the office of missionary from the independent congregation of Anti-work Christians of London, to the independent congregation of Anti-work Christians at Sydney, with the privilege and undivided monopoly of tract and hymn selling to the said congregation, together with a patent right (not royal patent, my brethren, but holy patent,) to all fees, donations, contributions, and payments of whatsoever kind, made by the said independent congregation of Anti-work Christians at Sydney, for and on account of the salvation of their souls . . . . . This, gentlemen, is the resolution I would propose, and I trust that some among you will readily be found to second it."

"That, sir, will I, and most joyfully," said Mr. Dellant, rising; "for I neither do nor can feel the shadow of a doubt, that our beneficent objects in despatching this mission will be more forwarded by this appointment than by any other, it is probable—gentlemen, I might say POSSIBLE—we could make—for where, I would ask, shall we find another Mrs Barnaby? May we not say, in the language of scripture, that she is a help meet for him, even for the Re-

verend Patrick O'Donagough, whom we have chosen."

Mr. Newbirth followed on the same side, giving many unanswerable reasons for believing that nothing which the stiff-necked, unconverted, obsolete ministers of the Church of England could do for the predestined army of saints at present located at Sidney, could approach in utility and saving efficacy of absolving grace, to what might be hoped from the ministry of Mr. O'Donagough, assisted by the lady he was so happy as to have engaged to be his wife.

"It gives me the most heartfelt pleasure, gentlemen," he continued, "that my little humble drawing-room should have been made the scene of this happy election. How many souls, now most probably grovelling in the lowest depths of vice, will have places secured them upon the highest seats of heaven, by your work, gentlemen; begun, continued, and ended within this one propitious hour! . . . I would now propose that we do all stand up and sing a hymn to the glory of sinners made perfect . . . Next, that we do all kneel down to

hear and join in an awakening prayer from our new missionary; and, finally, that we walk into Mrs. Newbirth's back drawing-room, there to partake of such creature comforts as she in her care shall have provided."

This speech was also received with great applause. Some few pleasant and holy remarks and observations were made by the other gentlemen present, and all things proceeded to the happy finale suggested by their host, in the most amicable and satisfactory manner, so that before Mr. O'Donagough rose to escort Mrs. Barnaby to the coach which was to convey her to Half Moon Street, he was given to understand, on the indefeasible authority of Mr Littleton, that he might consider himself already as the anti-work missionary elect, and might set about the preparations for his marriage and subsequent departure without farther uncertainty or delay.

* * * *

Mrs. Barnaby's troubles now seemed really at an end; nothing could move onward with a smoother, surer pace, than did the business which she and her chosen companion had be-

fore them. The bridegroom's noble father became liberal and kind, under the certainty of his clever son's certain departure .... The lawyers behaved exceedingly well about the settlements; influenced, perhaps, in some degree, by the wishes of the peer, who, as it seemed, was almost nervously anxious for the departure of the happy pair. ... The dressmakers worked briskly, and a very respectable subscription was raised among the ladies of the independent congregation for the purchase of several elegant little presents for the bride, which they thought might prove useful during her voyage.

In this happy state we will leave our heroine, in order to see how matters were proceeding at Clifton.

## CHAPTER XV.

AGNES GROWS MISERABLE.—AN EXPLANATORY CONVERSATION WITH COLONEL HUBERT LEAVES HER MORE IN THE DARK THAN EVER.—A LETTER ARRIVES FROM FREDERIC STEPHENSON.

At this period of their history the star of Agnes appeared much less propitious than that of her aunt Barnaby. Not all her inclination to construe every look and word of Colonel Hubert into something wiser and better, more noble and more kind than the looks and words of any other mortal man, could long prevent her from feeling that he was profoundly unhappy, and that, despite some occasional flashes of an emotion which her own heart taught her to know proceeded from love, he evidently avoided being

with her, as much as it was possible for him to do without attracting the attention of others.

Her aunt and his aunt went steadily on arranging between themselves a variety of preliminaries to the happy union they contemplated, while no hint that such an union was possible ever passed the lips of the intended bridegroom during any moment that circumstances placed him near his promised bride. More than once she saw him change colour when he approached her; and sometimes, but not often, she had caught his melancholy eyes fixed earnestly upon her, and it was at such moments that she felt persuaded he still loved her . . . . . but wherefore he, who had boldly wooed her when so many things conspired to make his doing it objectionable, should seem to shun her now that everything was made so smooth and easy for him, she vainly laboured to understand.

"For time nor place," she exclaimed with something like bitterness, "did then adhere, and yet he would make both. . . .

'They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Doth unmake him!'"

By melancholy degrees everything that had most contributed to her happiness, became her torment. The conversation of Miss Peters was inexpressibly irksome to her, particularly when they found themselves in confidential *tête-à-tête*, for then she could not help suspecting that her friend was longing to ask her some questions respecting the singularity of her lover's manner . . . . . the flattering notice of the well-pleased Lady Elizabeth, the sisterly affection manifested by the amiable Lady Stephenson, and, more than all the rest, the happy, bustling, business-like manner of her aunt Compton, who never for a moment seemed to forget that they were all preparing for a wedding.

So complete was this pre-occupation, that it was many days before the old lady perceived that her Agnes, in the midst of all this joyful preparation, looked neither well nor happy; nay, even when at last the sad eye and pale cheek of her darling attracted her attention, she persuaded herself for many days more that love-making was too sentimental a process to permit those engaged in it to be gay. She knew that the sighing of lovers was proverbial, and though she did not remember to have read any

thing upon the subject exactly resembling what she remarked in Agnes, and, to say truth, in Colonel Hubert also, she did not, for she could not, doubt that everything was going on just as it should do, though her own want of practical experience rendered her incapable of fully understanding it.

But if Agnes was wretched, Colonel Hubert was infinitely more so; for all the misery that she darkly feared, without knowing either its nature or for how long it was likely to continue, came to him wth the tremendous certainty of a misfortune that had already fallen upon him, and from which escape seemed less possible from day to day. She knew not what to think of him, and great, no doubt, was the unhappiness produced by such uncertainty, but greater still was the suffering produced by looking in her innocent face, and knowing, as well as Colonel Hubert did, why it grew daily paler. Not seldom, indeed, was he tortured by the apprehension that the line of conduct he had pursued in recalling Frederic Stephenson, was by no means so unquestionably right in its self-sacrificing severity as he had intended it should be. Had

he not endangered the tranquillity of Agnes, while guarding with jealous care his own proud sense of honour? If an unhappy concurrence of circumstances had involved him in difficulties that rendered his conduct liable to suspicion, ought he not to have endured the worst degree of contempt that this could bring upon him, rather than have suffered her peace to be the sacrifice?

Night and day these doubts tormented him. For hours he wandered through the roads on the opposite side of the river, where, comparatively speaking, he was sure no Clifton idlers could encounter him, and reviewing his own conduct in a thousand ways, found none that would make him satisfied with himself. At length, in the mere restlessness of misery, he determined to tell Agnes all.

"She shall know his love—his generous uncalculating love, while I stood by, and reasoned on the inconvenience her aunt Barnaby's vulgarity might bring. She shall know all . . . . . though it will make her hate me!"

Such was the resolution with which he crossed the ferry after wandering a whole morning in

Leigh Wood; and climbing the step-path too rapidly to give himself leisure to meditate temperately on the measure he had determined to pursue, he hurried forward to the dwelling of Miss Compton, and was already in her drawing-room before he had at all decided in what manner he should contrive to get Agnes alone.

In this, however, fortune favoured him; for Miss Compton having some point on which she desired to communicate with Lady Elizabeth, had ordered the carriage, and invited Agnes to pay a visit to Lady Stephenson; but the poor girl had no heart to sustain a conversation with a friend from whom she most earnestly desired to conceal all her thoughts—so she declined the invitation, alleging her wish to write a letter to Empton.

As much alone, and, if possible, more melancholy still, than when, a few short weeks before, he made his memorable visit in Half Moon Street, Colonel Hubert found Agnes listlessly lying upon a sofa, her eyes closed, but their lashes too recently wetted by tears to make him fancy her asleep. She was in an inner room, to which he entered through the open door that led from

the larger drawing-room, and he was close beside her before she was aware of his approach.

It was with a dreadful pang that he contemplated the change anxiety had wrought on her delicate features since the evening she first appeared to him in all the bright light-hearted joy of her new happiness under the protection of her aunt. Love, honour, gratitude, tenderness, and remorse, all rushed to his bosom, and so completely overpowered the philosophy by which he had hitherto restrained his feelings, that he dropped on his knees beside her, and seizing the hand that languidly hung by her side, covered it with passionate kisses.

An iron chain is not a stronger restraint than timid delicacy to such a nature as that of Agnes, and therefore she did NOT throw herself on the bosom of Colonel Hubert, and thus obliterate by one moment of unrestrained feeling all the doubts and fears that had so long tormented them both . . she only opened her beautiful eyes upon him, which seemed to say, "Is then the dark cloud passed that has divided us? . . . Hubert, may I be happy again?"

The unhappy Hubert, however, dared not

answer this appeal, though he read it, and felt it at the very bottom of his heart; and what under happier circumstances would have tempted him to kneel beside her for ever, now made him spring to his feet as if terrified at the danger that he ran.

"Agnes!" he said, "you must no longer be left ignorant of my misery .... you may, you must have seen something of it, but not all .. you have not seen, you have not guessed, what the struggle has been between a passion as fervent as ever warmed the heart of man and a sense of honour .... too late awakened perhaps ... which has made it a duty to suspend all pleadings for an avowed return till .... till ...."

"Till!" ... repeated Agnes, agitated but full of hope, that the moment was indeed come when the dark and mysterious cloud which had dimmed all her prospects should be dispelled.

"Hear my confession, Agnes, and pity me at least, if you find it impossible to excuse me ... Do you remember the first time that I ever saw you? ... It was at a shop at Clifton."

Agnes bowed.

"Do you remember the friend who was with me?"

Agnes bowed again, and this time she coloured too. Colonel Hubert sighed profoundly, but presently went on with the confession he had braced his nerves to make.

"That friend, Agnes, the generous, noble-hearted Frederic Stephenson, saw, even in that brief interview, the beauty, the grace, the delicacy which it took me days to develop... in short, he loved you, Agnes, before, almost before I had ever looked at you... I was his dearest friend. He hid no thought from me, and with all the frankness of his delightful character he confessed his honourable attachment... And how was it, think you, that I answered him?"

Agnes raised her eyes to his face with a very anxious look, but spoke not a word, and Colonel Hubert, with a heightened colour that mounted to his temples, went on.

"I told him, Miss Willoughby, that a young lady chaperoned by a person with the manners and appearance of your aunt Barnaby was not a fitting wife for him"..

The eyes of Agnes fell, and her cheeks too were now dyed with crimson. Colonel Hubert saw it and felt it all, but he went on.

"The subject was repeatedly revived between us, and as his attachment increased, so did also my opposition to it. I placed before him, in the strongest manner I was capable of doing, all the objections to the connexion as they then appeared to me, and I did it, as I thought, purely from a sense of duty to himself and his family, which had recently become so closely connected with my own. But alas! Agnes . . . my peace has been and is destroyed by the dreadful doubt whether some selfish feelings, unknown to myself, might not at length have mingled with these strong remonstrances. Knowing as I do the character of Sir Edward and his two sisters, no remorse was awakened in my mind so long as you remained with Mrs. Barnaby . . . and the last time I conversed with my poor friend, I used language so strong upon the subject, that he left me in great anger. But it appears that, notwithstanding his just resentment, these remonstrances had weight, for he immediately left the kingdom, and has, I believe, remained

in Paris ever since. Think then, Miss Willoughby . . . judge for me, if you can, with what feelings I contemplate the unlooked-for change in your position . . . . Oh! Agnes . . . would that your excellent Miss Compton had preserved her coldness to you till you had been my wife . . . Even then, I might have felt a pang for Stephenson—but the knowledge that his friends would not, like mine, have forgotten Mrs. Barnaby in their admiration for her niece, would have furnished a justification of the events which followed his departure, too reasonable to be set aside. But what must I feel now when I think of the banished Frederic? . . . Banished by me, that I might take his place."

* * * * * *

Excepting to Mary Peters, who had been aware of the attachment of Frederic Stephenson long before herself, Agnes had never breathed a hint to any human being of the proposal she had received from him, and it had not most assuredly been her intention ever to have named it to Colonel Hubert. She had, indeed, but rarely remembered it herself, and hoped and believed that, before they met again, the gay young man

would quite have forgotten it; but now she could preserve his secret no longer, and, eager to speak what she thought would entirely relieve his self-reproaches to hear, she said, with glowing cheeks and an averted eye,

"Let me, then, confess to you, Colonel Hubert" . . .

These unlucky words, however, intended as a preface to the only intelligence that could effectively have soothed his agitation, unfortunately increased it tenfold, and raising his hand to arrest what she was about to say, he replied with an impetuosity with which she could not at that moment contend — "Confess nothing, Miss Willoughby, to me . . I see that I have awakened feelings which I ought to have foreseen would inevitably be called into existence by such a disclosure . . . Suffer me to say a few words more, and I have done . . . A week ago, I did what I ought to have done, as soon as your present position was known to me . . . I wrote to Mr. Stephenson, and told him that every obstacle was removed . . . and that" . . .

"You wrote to him, Colonel Hubert!" ex-

claimed Agnes, greatly disturbed. . . . "Oh! why did you not tell me all this before?"

"It is not yet too late, Miss Willoughby," he replied, bitterly; "another letter shall follow my first . . . more explicit, more strongly urging his return."

"But you will not hear me, Colonel Hubert," said Agnes, bursting into tears. "Have patience for a moment, and you will understand it all."

At this moment a carriage stopped at the door, and the knocker and the bell together gave notice of Miss Compton's return.

"It is my aunt!" cried Agnes. "Indeed she must not see me thus, for how could I explain to her what must appear so strange as her finding me in tears, and you beside me. Let me see you again, Colonel Hubert—I pray you to let me see you again, when I may be able to speak to you . . . but now I must go;" and so saying, she escaped from the room just in time to avoid meeting Miss Compton at the door.

From a very early period of their short acquaintance, Miss Compton had made up her

mind to consider Colonel Hubert as a very superior personage, but of a remarkably grave and silent character; so much so, indeed, that while she admired and approved her Agnes the more for loving and being loved by so dignified an individual, she could not help wondering a little, occasionally, that so it should be. But this feeling she carefully concealed, and made it a point, whenever a shade of gravity more profound than usual was perceptible on his features, (a circumstance not unfrequent,) to avoid interfering with his reserve by any loquacious civility. This line of conduct had often been a great relief to him, but never more so than on the present occasion, when, if any lengthened greetings had occurred to stop his retreat, it would have been impossible for him to have preserved the outward semblance of cold composure in which he had hitherto found shelter from observation.

"You are going, Colonel Hubert?" she said. "Well, I will not detain you, for I am going to be busy myself—good morning." And so he escaped.

On reaching home, he found a letter waiting for him, which by no means tended to calm his

spirits. It was from Frederic Stephenson, and ran thus:—

"My dear Hubert,

"Your letter puzzles me; but not many hours after this reaches you, I hope we shall mutually understand each other better than we do at present. I am on my road to England, and as all explanation must be impossible till we meet, I will only add, that I am yours ever,

"Frederic Stephenson."

* * * * *

A few hours, then, and all doubt, all uncertainty, would be over! A full explanation must take place; and rather than endure a continuance of what he had lately suffered, Colonel Hubert felt inclined to welcome the result, be it what it might.

## CHAPTER XVI.

A DISCOVERY SCENE—PRODUCTIVE OF MANY NEW RELATIONS, AND VARIOUS OTHER CONSEQUENCES.

The day next but one after this letter reached him, Miss Compton and Agnes were engaged to dine with Lady Elizabeth. Colonel Hubert had not ventured to present himself in the Mall during the interval, for though, on cooler meditation, he did not believe that the unfortunate words, "Let me, then, confess to you, Colonel Hubert," were meant to usher a confession of love to his rival, he doubted not that they would have been followed by an avowal of her agreeing with himself in deeming his own conduct most reprehensible; and just then, he felt he could not receive this, notwithstanding its justice, in

such a manner as to assist in obtaining pardon for the fault. To Sir Edward he had mentioned the probability of his brother's early return, but without hinting at the chance of their seeing him at Clifton on his arrival in England.

The ladies of the party, namely, Lady Elizabeth, Lady Stephenson, Miss Compton, and Agnes, were assembled in the drawing-room, the two gentlemen not having yet quitted the dining-parlour, when a knock at the door announced company.

"Who can that be?" said Lady Stephenson. "Have you invited evening company?"

"Not a soul, my dear," replied her aunt; "I mean to have a treat again.... I think I am growing sick of curiosities."

"*Tant mieux*, dear aunt!" replied Lady Stephenson. "But invited or not, you have visiters coming now: I hear them on the stairs."

Lady Stephenson was right; the old butler opened the drawing-room door almost as she spoke, and announced "Mr. Stephenson!"

"Frederic!" exclaimed his fair sister-in-law, looking as if she meant to receive him very kindly.

"Young Stephenson!" said Lady Elizabeth, "I did not know that he was coming to Clifton."

"Sir Edward's brother, I suppose?" . . . said Miss Compton, . . . . but Agnes said nothing, though had any one laid a hand upon her heart, they would have discovered that his arrival was not a matter of indifference. To receive him with the appearance of it was, however, absolutely necessary, and she very resolutely assumed an aspect of tranquillity; it was not necessary that she should look towards the door to greet him as he entered, and therefore she did not do it; but, notwithstanding the attention she devoted to the pattern of the hearth-rug, she became aware, within a moment after this electrifying name had been announced, that not one only but three people were in the room, and that one of them was a lady.

Agnes then looked up, and the first figure which distinctly met her eye was not that of Frederic Stephenson, but of a gentleman bearing the stamp of some forty years, perhaps, upon his handsome but delicate features. He was not tall, but slightly and elegantly formed,

which was perceptible, though wrapped in a travelling frock trimmed with fur, and his whole appearance was decidedly that of a gentleman.

But who those might be who were with him, or how they were received by Lady Elizabeth, the eye of Agnes had no power to inquire, for it was fascinated, as it were, by the earnest gaze of this stranger, who, having already stepped forward a pace or two nearer to her than the rest, stood looking at her with very evident emotion.

The first words she heard spoken were in the voice of young Stephenson, which she immediately recognised, though the purport of them was unintelligible.

"Yes, my dear sir, . . . . you are quite right," he said; "that is our Agnes."

But though these words were somewhat startling, they drew her attention less than the expression of the large blue eyes that were fixed upon her; there was admiration, tenderness, and a strange sort of embarrassment, all legibly mingled in that earnest look . . but why was it fixed on her?

What effect this mute scene produced on the other persons present, Agnes could not know, for she did not withdraw her eyes from those of the mysterious stranger, till at length he turned from her, and stepping back, took the hand of a very young, but very beautiful girl, whom he led towards the sofa she occupied, and placing her on it, said,

"Agnes Willoughby! . . . . receive your sister . . . . and let her plead for her father and yours . . . . You have been long, long neglected, my poor child, but there has been some excuse for it . . . . Can you forgive me, Agnes?"

"Good God! . . . . My father!" she exclaimed, starting up, and stretching out her hands towards him. "Is it possible, sir, that you are indeed my father?"

"You speak as if you wished it were so, Agnes," he replied, taking her in his arms, and impressing a kiss upon her forehead, "and I will echo your words . . . . Is it possible?"

"Possible! . . . . O! yes, sir, it is possible . . . . I have so longed to know that I had a father! . . . . And is this sweet crea-

ture my sister?" she continued, turning her tearful eyes upon the beautiful girl, who upon this appeal sprang forward, and enclosing both her father and Agnes in her arms, replied to it by saying,

"Yes, dearest Agnes, I am your sister, indeed I am, and I know you very well, and all about you, though you know so little about me .... but you will not refuse to own me, will you?"

For all reply Agnes bent forward and kissed her fondly.

Miss Compton who, as may be supposed, had watched this discovery scene with no little interest, now stepped towards them, while young Stephenson was engaged in explaining it to Lady Elizabeth and his sister-in-law; and looking from one sister to the other, and from them both to their father, she said—"You will, perhaps, hardly remember that we ever met, Mr. Willoughby .... but my name is Compton, and I recal your features perfectly. You once passed an hour at my brother's house when I was there .... and that these girls are sisters, no one that sees them together will be

likely to deny . . . . God bless them both, pretty creatures ! . . . . I hope they will each be a blessing to the other . . . . But, to be sure, it seems to be a most romantic story . . . and wonderfully like those I used to read in my bower, Agnes."

" There is a good deal that is very sad in my part of it, Miss Compton," replied Mr. Willoughby, " but at this moment I can hardly regret it, as herein I hope to show some excuse for my long negligence respecting my poor girl. Take this on trust, my good lady, will you ?" he added, holding out his hand to her, " that no displeasure towards me may destroy the happiness of this meeting."

Miss Compton gave him her hand very frankly, saying,

" I have no right to be very severe upon you, Mr. Willoughby, for, without any misfortunes at all to plead as an excuse for it, our dear Agnes might tell you some naughty stories about me. . . . . But she does not look as if she were much inclined to complain of anybody. . . . . What a pair of happy, lovely looking creatures !

. . . . And how very strong the likeness to each other, and of both to you!"

Willoughby retired a step or two, and leaning against the chimney-piece, seemed disposed to enjoy the contemplation of the picture she pointed out, in silence. Lady Elizabeth claimed the attention of Miss Compton, that she might express her interest, satisfaction, surprise, and so forth. Lady Stephenson slipped out of the room to communicate the news to her husband and brother, and prepare them for the company they had to receive . . . . and then Frederic Stephenson approached the sisters, and drawing a chair towards them, very freely took a hand of each.

That of Agnes trembled. She felt that the happiness of her life would be for ever destroyed, if this young man was come back in consequence of Colonel Hubert's letter, with the persuasion that it was her purpose to accept him; and favourable as was the moment for a sort of universal philanthropy and unrestrained *épanchement de cœur*, she could not resist the impulse which led her to withdraw her hand,

and return his affectionate smile with a look of coldness and reserve.

Perfectly undaunted, however, the gay Frederic continued to look at her with an air of the most happy confidence; but suddenly, as it seemed, recollecting that it was possible, though they had all of them been at least ten minutes in the room together, no explanation might have yet reached her, he said, in a manner to show that he was too happy to be very grave, though quite sufficiently in earnest to deserve belief—"If you accept my Nora for a sister, Agnes, you must accept me for a brother too. She knows that till I saw her I thought you the most charming person in the world; and as she forgives me for this, I hope you will show as much resemblance to her in mind as in person, and forgive me for thinking, when I did see her, that she was still more charming than you."

And then it was that Agnes for the first time in her life felt wholly, perfectly, and altogether happy. She saw in an instant, with the rapid glance of love, that all the misty cloud that had hung between her and Hubert was withdrawn for ever . . . and then she felt how

very delightful it was to have a father, and such an elegant, interesting-looking father . . . and then she became fully aware what a blessing it was to have a sister, and that sister so beautiful, and so capable of inspiring love in every heart . . . save one, guarded as Hubert's was guarded. Her joy, her newborn gladness of spirit, danced in her eyes, as she now freely returned the young man's laughing glance, and restoring to him the hand she had withdrawn, she exclaimed, "Oh! Frederic . . . why did you not answer Hubert's letter, and tell him this?"

"It is so, then? . . . it is as I hoped, my sweet Agnes? . . . and you will be doubly our sister? . . . Why did I not answer Hubert's letter? Because it was the most mystical, unintelligible, dark, and diplomatic performance that ever was put forth. Did you see it, Agnes?"

"No, I did not," she replied, with a smile; "but I can imagine that it might have been a little in that style. Yet still you should have answered it."

"I did answer it—that is, I replied to it by

a line or two written in a prodigious hurry; but you must perceive that I could not enclose Nora in a cover; and as she is, to all intents and purposes, *my answer*, I was obliged to let him wait till I could convey her properly, and place her before his eyes and his understanding."

"And so convince him," replied Agnes, with another smile, full of her new-born gaiety, "that the moment she is seen all other ladies must be forgotten . . . prove that to Colonel Hubert, Mr. Stephenson, and I will prove to you" . . .

"What? — you tremendous-looking sibyl, what?"

"A very fatal sister!" she replied; and then the door opened, and Lady Stephenson preceded the two gentlemen she had brought from the dining-parlour, into the room.

Agnes, no longer the fearful, shrinking Agnes, sprang forward to meet them, and taking Colonel Hubert by the hand, led him to her father, saying in an altered accent, that at once entered his heart, and told him that all was right— "Let me present you to my father, Hubert— to my *dear* father, Colonel Hubert; he will

indeed be doubly dear to us, for he has brought with him a sister for both of us, whom I feel sure we shall for ever love."

But hardly did Agnes, who seemed newly awakened from some heavy spell that had benumbed her heart—hardly did she give time for a courteous greeting between the gentlemen, ere she passed her arm beneath that of Colonel Hubert, and led him to the sofa. Frederic started forward to meet him, and laying a hand on each shoulder, said in his ear, yet not so low but that Agnes heard him too—"It was lucky I did not take you to France with me, Hubert, or I should certainly never have got a wife at all; as it is, however, permit me"—he added aloud—"to present you, Colonel Hubert, to Miss Nora Willoughby. Nora, dearest, this gentleman is the best friend I have in the world—my brother's wife is his sister, and your sister, my fair bride elect, will very soon be his wife, or I cannot read the stars . . . so, as you may perceive, our catastrophe is exceedingly like that great model of all catastrophes, in which the happy hero says . . . 'And these are all my near relations—*ecce signum*, here is my

own elder brother. Sir Edward Stephenson, Miss Nora Willoughby. Is she not charming, Edward? I hope I have pleased you at last, and their ladyships, my sisters, too, for I assure you everything is very elegant, well-born, and so forth. . . . But you are not to sit down by her though, for all that, unless you make room for me between you, for she has already given away more smiles than I can at all afford to spare; and, besides, I have a hundred things to say to her . . . I want to ask her how she likes you all."

Colonel Hubert, as soon as his gay friend had reseated himself, gave one speaking look to Agnes, and then devoted himself entirely to Mr. Willoughby.

By degrees the party began to talk together with less of agitation and more of comfort; but Frederic was not permitted wholly to engross his young *fiancée*, for all the ladies crowded round her, and vied with each other in giving a cordial welcome to this young foreigner on the land of her fathers. She was in truth a very sweet young creature, and soon converted the kindness which circumstances called for,

into very cordially liking. Distant hopes were talked of without reserve, and immediate arrangements canvassed. Miss Compton kindly invited the young stranger to share her sister's apartment, a servant was despatched to secure rooms for Mr. Willoughby and Frederic at the hotel, and the happiness their unexpected arrival had brought to two harassed hearts of the party seemed to diffuse itself very delightfully among them all.

At length Miss Compton's carriage was announced, and while the cloaks of the fair sisters were wrapped round them by their vowed servants, Mr. Willoughby performed the same office for her, and took that opportunity of asking leave to wait upon her on the following morning, in order to relate to her such passages of the history of his long exile as might, in some degree, account for his having left her adopted child for so many years without a father.

While this appointment was making with the aunt, the niece contrived, unheard by all, to whisper a word or two which led to an appointment for her also.

Colonel Hubert had more than once that

evening taught her to understand, by the eloquence of looks, the delightful change that had been wrought within him; but it was Agnes who first found the opportunity of giving expression to it in words. He stood behind her as he arranged her cloak, and when this was done, she turned suddenly round to him, and said, in an accent of playful reproach, "Hubert!... may I be happy now?"

His answer was, "Will you see me to-morrow?... and alone?" She blushed—perhaps at remembering how often she had before wished to converse with him in the manner he now for the first time proposed, but she nodded her assent; he handed her to the carriage, pressed her hand, and whispered "eleven o'clock" as he put her into it, and then mounted to his chamber without exchanging a word more with any living soul, that he might enjoy, for the first time since he had yielded up his heart, the luxury of meditating on Agnes and her promised love, without any mixture of self-reproach to poison the enjoyment.

## CHAPTER XVII.

GREAT CONTENTMENT.

Had not Nora Willoughby been an interesting and amiable creature, her introduction at this moment to all the freedom of a sister's rights would certainly have been less agreeable than surprising to Agnes; and perhaps, notwithstanding the sweet expression of her lovely face, the pretty tenderness of her manner, and the lively interest which one so near in blood could not fail to awaken, Agnes, as she entered her bedroom on that eventful night, would rather have entered it alone. Her heart seemed too full to permit her conversing freely with any one; and it was by an effort not made altogether without pain, that she turned her thoughts from

Hubert and all that vast world of happiness which appeared opening before them, to welcome her fair sister to her bower, and to begin such a conversation with her as sisters so placed might be expected to hold. But she was soon rewarded for the exertion, for it was quite impossible to pass an hour of intimate intercourse with Nora without loving her, for she was made up of frankness, warm affection, light-heartedness, and sweet temper.

As soon as Peggy had performed all the services required of her, and that the door was fairly closed behind her, Nora threw her arms round the neck of Agnes, and pressed her in a long and fond embrace.

"Dear, dear Agnes!" she exclaimed, "I wish you could share the pleasure that I enjoy at this moment — but it is impossible . . . I come upon you suddenly, unexpectedly, unintelligibly, and must rather startle and astound, than give you the delight that you give me. For I have been preparing to love you for many weeks past, and have been longing till I was almost sick to get to you. And after such eager and sanguine expectations as mine, it is

so delightful to find oneself not disappointed!"

"And is such the case with my sweet sister?" replied Agnes caressingly.

"Indeed, indeed it is!—Frederic told me you were very beautiful—but I did not expect to find you half so . . . so elegant, so finished, so every way superior."

"I shall quarrel with you, Nora, if you say such very fine things to me . . . Perhaps I think you very pretty, too, dear; but if I do, I must not say so, because they tell us that we are so much alike, it would be like admiring myself."

"Well! . . . and you cannot help admiring yourself, it is impossible . . . But, sister Agnes, what a blessing it was that you did not happen to fall in love with Frederic! What would have become of me if you had? . . . for do you know, I loved almost as soon as I saw him. It was all so odd! It was at the Italian opera that we first met; and I could not help observing, that the handsomest man I had ever seen was looking at me almost incessantly. Papa never saw a bit about it, for when he is listening to music he never cares for anything. However, I do

assure you, I tried to behave properly, though, if I had done quite the contrary, papa would never have found it out. I never looked at him at all above three or four times, and that was accidentally from happening to turn round my head. But whether I thought about it or not, there were his beautiful large eyes always sure to be fixed upon me; and when the opera was over, he must have run out of his box the moment we left ours, for I saw him as we got into the fiacre, standing close beside it. Well, I hardly know how it happened, but from that time I never stirred out without meeting him; he never spoke of course, but that did not prevent our knowing one another just as well as if we had been the oldest acquaintance. At last, however, he managed very cleverly to find out that papa was acquainted with M. Dupont, who gives such beautiful concerts, and receives all the English so hospitably, and he asked as a great favour to be invited to meet us; and so he was, and then we were introduced, and then everything went on beautifully, for he knew you, and the name of Willoughby, and the likeness, and all that, convinced him that we must be the

same family; so he and papa very soon made it all out, and then he came to call upon us every day; and very, very, very soon afterwards I was engaged to be his wife as soon as possible, after we all got back to England."

"Thank you, dearest Nora!" replied Agnes, who, notwithstanding all her pre-occupation, had found no difficulty in listening very attentively to this narrative; "I cannot tell you all the pleasure your little history has given me. . . . There is nobody in the world I should like so well for a brother as Frederic Stephenson, and there is nobody in the world I should like so well for a sister as Frederic Stephenson's wife."

"That is delightful!" cried Nora, joyfully, "and we certainly are two of the luckiest girls in the world to have everything just as we would wish. . . . But, Agnes, there is one thing I shall never understand . . . . How could you help falling in love with Frederic when he fell in love with you?"

"Because I happened just then," replied Agnes, laughing, "to be falling in love with some one else."

"Well! certainly that was the most fortunate

thing in the world . . . . and Frederic himself thinks so now. He told me that he had a great mind to shoot himself when you refused him, but that the very first moment he saw me, he felt certain that I should suit him a great deal better than you would have done."

"That I am sure is quite true, Nora," replied Agnes very earnestly, "for I too feel certain that I never could have suited anybody but Colonel Hubert. . . . And now, my sweet sister, let us go to sleep, or we shall hardly be up early enough to meet the friends who, I think, will be wishing to see us again . . . . Good night, dearest!"

"Good night, darling Agnes! . . . Is not it pleasant to have a sister, Agnes? . . . It is so nice to be able to tell you everything. . . . I am sure I could never be able to do it to anybody else. Good night!"

"Bless you, sweet Nora!" replied Agnes; and then, each nestling upon her pillow, and giving some few happy dreamy thoughts to the object they loved best, they closed their fair young eyes, and slept till morning.

* * * *

The waking was to both of them, perhaps, somewhat like the continuance of a dream; but Peggy came and threw the light of day upon them, while each fair girl seemed to look at her own picture as she contemplated her pretty bedfellow, and appeared to be exceedingly well pleased by the survey.

It was already late, and Agnes, rapidly as she was learning to love her companion, did not linger at her toilet, but leaving Nora, with a hasty kiss, to the care of Peggy, she hastened to the breakfast-table, and made aunt Betsy's heart glad, by telling her at last, that she expected Colonel Hubert would call about eleven o'clock, and that if she did not think it wrong, she should like to speak to him for a few minutes alone.

"Wrong, my child!" exclaimed Miss Compton; "why, I never in my life read a work painting the manners of the age, in which I did not find interviews, sometimes occurring three or four times in a day, entirely *tête-à-tête*, between the parties."

"Then I may go into the back drawing-room presently . . . may I, aunt Betsy? . . . And perhaps you would tell William. . . ."

"Yes, yes, my dear, I'll tell him everything. . . . But eat some breakfast, Agnes, or I am sure you will not be able to talk . . . I suppose it is about your new sister, and your father, and all that, that you want to speak to him."

"There are many things, aunt Betsy . . . . But, good heavens! there is a knock . . . . Will it not look very odd for you to send him in to me?"

Without waiting to give an answer, the agile old lady intercepted William's approach to the door in time to give the order she wished; and in two minutes more Colonel Hubert was ushered into a room where the happy but blushing Agnes was alone.

His first few steps towards her were made at the pace at which drawing-room floors are usually traversed, but the last part of the distance was cleared by a movement considerably more rapid, for she had risen in nervous agitation as he approached, and for the first time that he had ever ventured a caress, he threw his arms around her, and pressed her to his heart. Agnes struggled not to disengage

herself, but wept without restraint upon his bosom.

"You do then love me, Agnes? . . . At last, at last our hearts have met, and never can be severed more! But still you must tell me very often that you have forgiven me, dearest, for is it not difficult to believe? And does it not require frequent vouching?"

"What is it, Montague, that you would have forgiven?" said Agnes, looking up at him, and smiling through her tears.

This was the first time that her lips had pronounced his christian name to any ears but her own, and she blushed as she uttered it.

"Agnes! my own Agnes!" he exclaimed, "you have forgiven me, or you would not call me Montague! . . . How is it possible," he continued, looking fondly at her, "that a word so hackneyed and familiar from infancy as our own name can be made to thrill through the whole frame like a touch of electricity?"

He drew her to the sofa from which she had risen, and placing himself by her, said, "Now, then, Agnes, let us sit down soberly together,

and take an unvarnished retrospect of all that has passed since we first met . . . Yet why should I ask for this? . . . I hate to think of it . . . for it is a fact, Agnes, which his subsequent attachment to your sister must not make you doubt, Frederic and his seven thousand a year would have been at your disposal, had not my dissuasions prevented it. . . . And had this been so, who knows . . ."

A shade of melancholy seemed once again settling on the noble countenance of Colonel Hubert; Agnes could not bear it, and looking earnestly at him, she said,

"Montague! answer me sincerely this one question: which is the strongest feeling in your mind at this moment—the pleasure derived from believing that your influence on Frederic was so great, or the pain of doubting how the offer you speak of would have been received?"

"I have no pleasure in believing I have influence on any one save yourself," he answered gravely.

"I am glad of that, Montague," she said, "because you somewhat overrated your influence with my brother elect. Save for your foolish

doubts, infidel! . . . . . you never should have known it, but . . . . . Frederic Stephenson did propose to me, Hubert, before he went abroad."

"And you refused him, Agnes!"

"And I refused him, Hubert."

"Oh! had I known this earlier, what misery should I have been spared!" cried Colonel Hubert. "You know not, you could not know all I have suffered, Agnes . . . . . yet surely, dearest! when last we spoke together, it was but yesterday, in this very room, you must then have guessed the cause of the dreadful restraint that kept us asunder."

"There was no need of guessing then," replied Agnes, smiling, "for you told me so distinctly."

"Then why not on the instant remove the load from my heart? . . . . . were you quite incapable of feeling how galling it must have been to me?"

"I'll tell you how that came to pass," said Agnes, rising. . . . . "Do you sit still there, as I did yesterday, and say, 'Let me then confess to you, Colonel Hubert,' . . . . . and then I will answer thus," . . . . . and raising her hand, as if to

stop his speech, she added, mimicking his impatient tone,

"'Confess nothing, Miss Willoughby, to me!' ... And then you told me you had written to him, and when I exclaimed, with some degree of dismay at the idea of your having written to recal him, you again interrupted me by saying that you would do it again ..... and then my aunt came, and so we parted ..... Then whose fault was it that I did not tell you?"

"My own, Agnes, it was my own; and alas! ..... I did not suffer for it alone ..... How wretched you must have been made by my vehemence! ..... But you have forgiven me, and all this must be forgotten for ever ..... There is, however, one subject on which I would willingly ask a few more questions—these, I hope, you will answer, Agnes?"

"Yes!" she replied, gaily, "you may hope for an answer to all your questions ..... provided, that just when I am about to speak, you do not raise your arm *thus*, in order to prevent me.

"I will do my utmost to avoid it," he replied," and for the greater security will place the offend-

ing arm *thus*," . . . . . throwing it round her; "and now tell me, Agnes, why it was that you would not accept Frederic Stephenson?"

"And will you be pleased to tell me, Colonel Hubert, why it was that you did not propose to . . . . . to anybody else but me?"

"Because I loved you, and you only."

"Because I loved you, and you only," repeated Agnes.

"Is that an echo?" said Colonel Hubert.

"No!" replied Agnes . . . . . "it is only the answer to your question."

"Then, exactly when I was occupied in finding reasons incontrovertible why the niece of Mrs. Barnaby should never be loved by mortal man, the young, the lovely Agnes Willoughby was loving me?"

"Even so," said Agnes, somewhat mournfully; "false impressions have worked us so much woe, that it would not be wise to let a little feminine punctilio prevent you seeing things as they are. . . . . Yet it is hardly fair, Hubert, to make me tell you this." . . . . .

"Oh, say not so!" he replied; "mistake not the source of this questioning, for, Agnes, be secure

'That Hubert, for the wealth of all the world,
Would not offend thee!'

But can you wonder that, after all I have suffered, my heart and soul thirsts for an assurance of your love? What might well suffice another, Agnes, ought not to suffice me . . . . . I am so much older." . . . . .

"I cannot help it, Montague . . . . . nor could I help it when you took me out of the clutches of Major Allen, upon the Windmill-hill, nor when you were pleased to be so gracious as to approve my singing . . . . . nor upon a great many other occasions, when it would have been wise for me to remember it, perhaps. But if I love you, and you love me, I cannot see how your age or mine either need interfere to prevent it."

Perhaps at last Colonel Hubert arrived at the same satisfactory conclusion, for the conversation was a long one; and before it was ended, some little sketchings of his feelings during the early part of their acquaintance brought to Agnes' mind the soothing belief, that after the evening of the Clifton ball her image had never forsaken his fancy more, though it was by slow

degrees that it had grown into what he called such "terrible strength" there, as to conquer every other feeling.

Agnes listened to him as he stated this with most humble-minded and unfeigned astonishment, but also with most willing belief, and then, following his example, he quoted Shakspeare, exclaiming—

"And if an angel should have come to me
And told me thus,
I would have believed no tongue but Hubert's."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A RETROSPECT AND CONCLUSION.

Mr. Willoughby was little less punctual to his appointment than Colonel Hubert; and as the young Nora, weary with her journey, and exhausted from the excitement of the scenes which followed it, had not yet left her bed, he too, had the advantage of a *téte-à-tête.*

It is needless to enter upon any minute repetition of a narrative which had, in fact, little or no connexion with the personages of our drama. It was evident that Mr. Willoughby had suffered much, both from the early loss of his fair young wife, and the continued hostility, or, more properly speaking, the continued neglect of his family. He had exchanged into a regiment sent

on a dangerous and disagreeable service, and, with broken spirits and failing health, might very likely have perished before it was ended, had not his "good gifts" very suddenly made captive the affections of a young girl almost as pretty as poor Sophia Compton, and quite as rich as she was the contrary.

This marriage converted him into the only son and heir of a wealthy merchant; all his new family required of him, in exchange for their daughter and their wealth, was, that he should live amongst them. This he consented to do, but his life was not a happy one. With the prospect of great possessions before him, he was kept in almost penniless dependence upon his father-in-law; all his wants, indeed, profusely supplied, but with no more power to assist in the maintenance of the child he had left in England, than if he had been a slave chained to the oar.

For sixteen years he had led this painful life of penniless splendour, in the course of which he was again left a widower with one little girl; but though his existence in his father-in-law's family had lost its only charm by this event, he

was prevented from making any effort to change it, as much by his total inability to support himself elsewhere, as by consideration for the interest of his child. As she grew up, he began once more to feel that life was not altogether a bore and a burden, and at length his passive submission to years of wearying annoyance was rewarded by finding himself, at the death of the generous but tyrannical Mr. Grafton, the possessor of a handsome life income, and the sole guardian of the young heiress his daughter.

It was then that, for the first time, he felt disposed to recal himself to the memory of those he had left behind him in England; and the desire to do so became so strong, that he lost no time in finally arranging his affairs in the country of his exile, and taking his departure for Europe. For the sake of having a friend as commander of the ship in which he sailed, he took his passage for Havre, and, once landed on the coast of France, he yielded to Nora's entreaties that they should pass a few weeks at Paris before they left it. His accidental meeting with Mr. Stephenson there was then related, and its consequences as it respected his daugh-

ter, and their journey home together, concluded his narration.

"Your romance, Mr. Willoughby," replied Miss Compton, "appears likely to come to a very happy conclusion . . . but I confess I wonder that never during your sixteen years of what appears to have been very perfect leisure, you could never have found time to make any single inquiry about your little Agnes."

"And I wonder at it too, Miss Compton . . . but it is more easy to recal the feelings that led to this, than to explain them. I believe that the total impossibility of my transmitting any share of the wealth amidst which I lived to a child whom I had great reason to fear might want it, was the primary cause of it . . . and then came the hope that at no very distant day my inquiries for her might be made in a manner less torturing to my feelings than by acknowledging myself to be alive, in circumstances of high-fed pauperism, without the power of relieving any wants, however pressing, with which my inquiries might happen to make me acquainted. Had I known that you, Miss Compton, had adopted my little girl, I should not so long have suffer-

ed her to believe me dead, because I had not the power of making my being alive a source of joy to her."

Whether Miss Compton thought this apology a good one, or the reverse, does not appear; for all the branches of the party who so unexpectedly met together at the house of Lady Elizabeth Norris, continued from that time forward to live on terms of the most agreeable amity together; and perhaps the only symptom by which some little feeling of disapprobation might have been perceived, was Miss Compton's begging to decline, on the part of all interested, Mr. Willoughby's proposal of insuring his life for ten thousand pounds, as a portion for his eldest daughter.

"I do assure you, sir, there is no occasion for it," said the little spinster, with great good-humour, but also with a very evident intention of having her own way . . . . . "I believe that if you will mention the subject to Colonel Hubert, or to Lady Elizabeth Norris, his aunt, you will find that they both agree with me in thinking such a sacrifice of income on your part quite unnecessary, and decidedly unwise. Your sis-

ters have not behaved to you kindly, but they have connected themselves well, and I believe we all think it would be more advantageous to both your daughters that their favour should be propitiated by your appearing before them in a style which may show you have no need of their assistance, than by anything else you can do for them. The young ladies are both about to marry well, and with fortunes very fairly proportioned to those of their respective husbands, and any family coolness with such near relations as Lady Eastcombe and the honourable Mrs. Nivett would be both disadvantageous and disagreeable."

"My noble sisters will be vastly well disposed to welcome me now, Miss Compton, I have little doubt," replied Mr. Willoughby, with as much asperity as he was capable of feeling for any offence committed against him; "and I confess to you that the reconciliation would be particularly agreeable to me, from the power your generous adoption of my poor girl gives me now of proving to them that my marriage with Sophia Compton was not such a connexion as to merit the severity with which they have treated it."

"I have no sort of objection to your proving this to them in any manner that you please," replied Miss Compton; "and I rather think the most effectual mode of doing so will be, by permitting the portion of Agnes to be furnished by Sophia Compton's aunt."

"Five thousand, then, let it be, Miss Compton; five thousand settled upon younger children," said Mr. Willoughby.

"No, sir," persisted the old lady, "it must not be, if you please. The property of Compton Basett, with the name, and a sum of money withal sufficient considerably to add to and improve the estate, will be settled by me on the second son of your daughter Agnes. Lady Elizabeth, on the part of her nephew, adds ten thousand pounds to the settlement on younger children, which, together with my property, will of course belong to Agnes for her life. I hope, sir, this statement will satisfy you respecting the provision to be made for Miss Willoughby, and prevent your feeling any further anxiety on the subject."

It was impossible Mr. Willoughby could declare himself dissatisfied, and from this time he

ventured no further allusion to the scheme of insuring his life.

* * * * *

Preparations for the two marriages now immediately began; and the interval necessary to the completion of settlements, and the building of carriages and dresses, was, at the earnest request of Agnes, to be spent at Clifton. She loved the place, for it was identified in her memory with the first sight of Hubert, and she often declared that there was no spot on the earth's surface she should ever love so well as that little esplanade behind the windmill on which Colonel Hubert first offered her his arm, without deeming it necessary to utter a word of explanation for doing so. The vicinity of Mary Peters, too, was another reason, and no trifling one, for this partiality; and as not one of the party had any point of reunion to plead for in preference, it was there that several weeks of present enjoyment and happy anticipation were passed.

* * * * *

It was about midway between the time at which everything was settled between the

lovers, their beloveds, and all parents, friends, and guardians interested therein, and the happy day on which the double espousals were celebrated, that Mr. and Mrs. Peters invited the whole party to dinner. No strangers were permitted to disturb the freedom of the society thus assembled at dinner, though, to gratify Lady Elizabeth's love of music, one or two proficients in that science were invited for the evening. The gentlemen, who probably thought the society in the drawing-room more agreeable than that of good Mr. Peters, even though backed by his excellent wine, were already partaking coffee with the ladies, when a reduplicated knocking announced the arrival of visiters.

"The Chamberlains, I suppose," said Mrs. Peters. "How very early they are!"

But she was mistaken, it was not the Chamberlains; for a footman threw wide the drawing-room door, and announced "Mr. and Mrs. O'Donagough!"

"Mr. and Mrs. who?" said Mrs. Peters to Mary.

"Mr. and Mrs. what?" said Elizabeth to Lucy.

But before the parties thus questioned could have found time to answer, even had they been possessed of the information required, a lady in sober-coloured silk, with little rouge and no ringlets, followed by a handsome young man in black, entered the room, and considerably before many who had seen that lady before could recal the name by which they had known her, or reconcile her much changed appearance to their puzzled recollections, Mrs. Peters was enfolded in her arms.

"My dear sister Peters!" said Mrs. O'Donagough, "you are surrounded by so large a party, that I fear these last moments which I meant to dedicate to the affection of my kinsfolk, may be more inconvenient than pleasurable to you. But you cannot, I am sure, refuse me some portion of your society this evening, as it is probably the last one we shall ever pass together. Give me leave, sister Peters, to introduce you to my husband, the Reverend Mr. O'Donagough. Mr. Peters, Mr. O'Donagough; Mr. James Peters, Mr. O'Donagough; Mr. O'Donagough, my dear Mary; my husband, young ladies; Mr. O'Donagough, my dear

Elizabeth and Lucy! Good Heaven! Agnes here? and my aunt Compton too . . . Well, so much the better, my dear Patrick; I shall now have the pleasure of presenting you to more relations, and as I should be proud to introduce you to all the world, this can only be an increase of pleasure to me. Agnes Willoughby, my dear, I can't say you behaved very well to me when the cheerful sort of life I indulged in, solely on your account, was changed for sorrow and imprisonment; but, nevertheless, my religious principles, which are stronger, my dear, than even when you knew me, lead me to forgive you, and, better still, they lead me to introduce you to your excellent and exemplary uncle, the Reverend Mr. O'Donagough."

During the whole course of these speeches not a single voice had been heard to pronounce a syllable in reply, excepting that of Mr. Peters, who put his heels together and made a bow when she paused, husband in hand, before him, and said, "Your servant, sir!"

But Agnes, when her turn came, though colouring most painfully at being so addressed, and with her heart sinking under the unexam-

pled annoyance of this intrusion, contrived to say, "I hope I see you well, aunt."

"Yes, Miss Agnes; well, and happy too, I promise you; and I wish you were likely to be as well settled, child, as I am. But I should like to know who it is has come forward with money to dress you up so? . . . . You have not been singing on the stage, I hope? . . . . Your uncle would be dreadfully shocked at such a thing; for he says that stage-plays are an abomination. . . . . And upon my word, aunt Compton, you are grown mighty smart too in your old age. Mercy on me! . . . . Vanity of vanities! . . . . all is vanity!" . . . . And then looking into the inner room, and perceiving that she had several more acquaintances there, she again took her husband by the hand and led him into it, presenting him to Lady Elizabeth, her niece, Colonal Hubert, and the two Stephensons. But when she came to Mr. Willoughby, who was standing with his youngest daughter at a window, she stopped, and looking at him very earnestly, seemed puzzled.

He bowed, though evidently without knowing her, and then, turning from her unplea-

santly curious scrutiny, resumed his conversation with Nora.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mrs. O'Donagough . . . . "but I should really be very much obliged if you would tell me your name."

"My name, madam, is Willoughby."

"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed the bride, "O'Donagough, dearest, this is an eventful day indeed. . . . Behold your brother!"

The two gentlemen stared at each other with an expression of countenance more indicative of surprise than of fraternal affection . . . . Mr. Willoughby, indeed, looked very much as if he suspected that the poor lady, be she who she would, was decidedly not in her right mind; while her husband, rather weary, perhaps, of such a continuity of introductions, escaped from her side, and stationed himself at another window.

"Willoughby! . . . . dearest Willoughby! . . . . Is it possible that you can have forgotten me? . . . . Can you, indeed, have forgotten the sister of your wife?"

"Miss Martha? . . . . Is it possible? . . . . I beg your pardon, Mrs. Donagough . . . . I

certainly did not recollect you. I hope that I have the pleasure of seeing you well?"

"My dearest Willoughby! . . . . You have no idea how exceedingly delighted I am to see you . . . . What *has* become of you all this time? . . . . I always supposed that you had been sold for a slave on the coast of Barbary . . . . and I thank God, and my excellent husband . . . . where is he? . . . . I am sure the Reverend Mr. O'Donagough will thank God for your escape. . . . . And who is that pretty young lady? . . . Dear me, she looks very much as if she was the daughter of your cruel master, and had fallen in love with you, and set you at liberty . . . . Poor Sophy! . . . . one could not expect you should remember her for ever . . . even I, you see, have forced myself to forget my poor dear Mr. Barnaby. . . . But now I think of it, you can't know anything about Mr. Barnaby. . . . . Do, my dear Willoughby, sit down with me on this sofa, and let us have a talk."

It was impossible for Mr. Willoughby to refuse, even had he wished it, which he really did not; and the perfect security of being welcome, which Mrs. O'Donagough displayed in

her manner of establishing herself, in some sort obliged Mrs. Peters to act as if she were so. . . . The different groups which had been deranged by her entrance, resumed their conversation; coffee and tea included the intruders in its round, and everybody excepting Miss Compton seemed once more tolerably at their ease. She could not affect to recover her equanimity like the rest, but placing a low chair immediately behind the sofa on which Lady Elizabeth's tall figure was placed, she sat down so as to be completely concealed by her, saying, "Will your ladyship have the great kindness to let me hide myself here? . . . . That horrible woman is, I confess it, my own brother's daughter, but she is . . . . no matter what she is . . . . I am much to blame, no doubt, . . . . but I hate to look upon her."

"Put yourself quite at your ease, Miss Compton," replied Lady Elizabeth, laughing; "I have not the least difficulty in the world in comprehending your feelings. In you she has conquered the feeling of relationship; in me, an instinct stronger still perhaps, namely, that of finding amusement in absurdity. But I almost

think she has cured me of my menagerie caprice for ever. Yet it is difficult, too, not to enjoy the spectacle she offers with her young husband in her hand. But I don't mean to lose my music for her . . . Miss Peters, my dear — pray set your piano-forte going."

This hint was immediately obeyed, and proved extremely conducive to the general ease. Good-natured Mr. Peters entered into conversation with the reverend missionary, and soon learnt both his destination, and the interesting fact that he and his bride were to sail from the port of Bristol the day but one following. This he judiciously took an opportunity of speedily communicating to his lady, who took care that it should not long remain a secret to any individual present, excepting Mr. Willoughby, who continued in too close conversation with his sister-in-law to permit his being made a sharer in the general feeling of satisfaction which this information produced. Even Miss Compton, on hearing it, declared, that if the bride were really going to set off immediately for Botany Bay, there to remain for the term of her natural life, she thought she should be able to look at

her for the rest of the evening with great philosophy. And, in proof of her sincerity, she moved her place, and seated herself beside her friend Lady Elizabeth, more than half inclined to share in the amusement, which, notwithstanding her good resolutions, that facetious lady seemed inclined to take in contemplating the newly-married pair.

The conversation, meanwhile, between the two old acquaintances, went on with considerable interest on both sides. Mr. Willoughby again related his adventures, and introduced his pretty daughter, and then, recurring once more to Silverton, Mrs. O'Donagough said, in an accent that betokened considerable interest in the question—"Willoughby!—can you tell me anything about your old friend Tate?"

"I have heard nothing of him of late years; but of course you know that he married his cousin, Miss Temple, very soon after we left Silverton."

"*Very* soon?" said Mrs. O'Donagough, with a sigh.

"Yes, my dear sister," replied Willoughby, with a melancholy smile; "it is not often that

hearts, lost in country quarters, fail to return to the losers as they march out of the town. Happily both for the boys and girls concerned, but few such adventures end as mine did."

"Happily, indeed, for me!" replied the bride, with a toss of her head: "for aught I know, Tate may be alive now . . . and the happy wife of O'Donagough may well rejoice that no such thraldom was the consequence of Captain Tate's presumptuous attachment!"

Though Mr. Peters was really very civil, and though Mr. James joined for several minutes in the conversation, it is probable that the reverend missionary did not enjoy it so much as his lady did listening to Mr. Willoughby; for at an early hour he told her it was time to take leave. She instantly obeyed, and began making her circular farewell—a ceremony of rather an embarrassing nature to many of the party, for out of the fifteen persons she left in the room, she kissed eight; Lady Elizabeth, Sir Edward and Lady Stephenson, Colonel Hubert, and Frederic, being permitted to escape without even an attempt at joining them in this valedictory greeting, and Miss Compton, rising at her ap-

proach, making her by far the lowest courtesy her knees ever performed, in a manner which effectually averted it from herself.

* * * *

Mrs. O'Donagough's departure from England was a great blessing to all the connexions she left behind, for, had she continued within reach of them, it is hardly possible but some annoyance would have been the consequence. As it was, however, sorrow seemed to depart with her; for seldom does so large a portion of happiness as fell to the lot of those she had formerly tormented, attend the career of any.

Colonel Hubert, although he actually did very soon become a general, never again felt any alarm on the score of his age, but had the happiness of knowing that he was beloved with all the devoted tenderness that his heart desired, and his noble character deserved. Agnes never ceased to glory in her choice, and loved nothing better than to make Aunt Betsy confess that her great nephew, notwithstanding his being a general, was more like a hero than any other man she had ever seen. Miss Compton lived to see an extremely fine lad, called Compton Hubert

Compton, becoming so fond of the fields and the pheasants of Compton Basett, as to leave her no rest till she had persuaded the trustees of the settlement she had made to expend the money in their hands upon the purchase of some neighbouring lands,—including the manor in which they were situated, and the converting of the old roomy farm-house into a residence which she confessed to be worthy of the representative of the ancient Compton race. This alteration, indeed, took place several years before the old lady died, and it was at Compton Basett, thus metamorphosed, that she had the pleasure of observing to Mrs. Wilmot, that the conversation they had held on that spot together, had not been altogether without effect.

Mr. Willoughby and his elegant sisters became perfectly reconciled, a circumstance extremely agreeable to Lady Elizabeth Norris, as it gave her repeated opportunities of convincing herself that the nose of her niece, Mrs. General Hubert, was decidedly an improvement upon that of the honourable Miss Nivett, though the family resemblance was sufficiently remarkable. Frederic and Nora were as gay and happy a

couple as ever enjoyed ten thousand a year together. Occasionally, of course, they were in debt, as all people of ten thousand a year must be; but, on the whole, they contrived to bring matters round wonderfully well, and as their property was fortunately settled, and Sir Edward happened to die without children, their family of six sons and six daughters were left at last very tolerably provided for.

* * * *

Mrs. O'Donagough's voyage to New England was quite as agreeable as such a voyage generally is; and on arriving, she was greatly consoled for any little inequalities in her young husband's temper by the great success of his preaching. For at least six months after their arrival, he was more in the fashion than any gentleman of any profession had ever been before; but, at the end of that time, the reverend preacher unfortunately was present at a horse-race, upon which the recondite wisdom of the fable which treats of a cat turned into a woman, must have become manifest to every reflecting mind acquainted with the circumstances of Mr. O'Donagough's early life; for no sooner did the

race begin, than almost unconsciously he offered a bet to one of his congregation who stood near him; and before the end of the day, he was seen mounted in a blue and yellow jacket, riding for a jockey who had broken his leg in a hurdle race.

It was then that Mrs. O'Donagough became sensible of the blessing of having a settlement; and thankful was she to the noble father of her spouse for all the care bestowed to prevent his bringing himself again to penury, when he was brought home dead to her one fine afternoon, having lost his seat and his life together in a leap upon which he had betted considerably more than he possessed.

She mourned for him as he deserved; but not being upon this occasion very nice upon whom she could devolve the task of wearing black, she announced to all her Sydney friends that it was not the fashion in the old world for ladies of distinction to wear that dismal colour for more than a month for any husband who died by accident; and it was, therefore, once more, in all the splendour of her favourite rainbow colouring that she met a few months afterwards her old friend Major Allen.

He entered into no very tedious or particular details respecting the reasons for, or the manner of, his voyage out, but testified much cordial satisfaction at the meeting; while, on the other hand, Mrs. O'Donagough was as remarkably communicative as he was the reverse, dilating largely on my Lord ——'s careful attention to her interest on her marriage with his son, who had insisted upon coming out in a fit of religious enthusiasm, which, as she sensibly observed, was not at all likely to last.

It was not very long after this meeting that Mrs. O'Donagough became aware of the truth of the song, which says,

> "Mais on retourne toujours
> A ses premières amours."

For it was evident that the sentiment which circumstances had so rudely shaken at Clifton a year or two before, was again putting forth its leaves and flowers, and that it depended upon herself alone whether she should not yet become the wife of the accomplished Major Allen.

For a few weeks she struggled with her remaining affection, but at the end of that time it

overpowered all her doubts and fears, and only stipulating that, as before, all she had should be firmly settled upon herself, she once more entered the holy state of matrimony. In justice to the peerage, it ought to be stated, that on this her third wedding-day she wore around her neck a very handsome necklace of shell, carefully sent out to her by the confidential agent of my Lord Mucklebury.

THE END.

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